

The Morning After (the night before): Emancipating Spectators in Participatory Live Art

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Abstract

This thesis develops a theoretical framework for the analysis of spectator-participation in live art by examining the performance practices of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's La Pocha Nostra, Marina Abramović, and Gob Squad. It explores the potentialities and limitations of participation from all sides of the performance border, drawing on my experiences as a performing-spectator, watching-spectator, and as an artist-collaborator with La Pocha Nostra. Unravelling the relationship between these roles, it reveals how participation can create a new hierarchy amongst spectators. The thesis offers a new way of looking at the phenomenology of participatory live art by determining these encounters as a complex network of contradictory and interdependent relations, underlined by the "paradox of participation": the duality of holding the position of both performer and spectator at the same time. Accordingly, it argues that these performances constitute a "symmathesy" of participation, to use Nora Bateson's term, which should be viewed as a whole experience rather than as a series of parts. Advancing on from "the emancipated spectator", as outlined by Jacques Rancière, the study reconsiders its meaning within live art. In doing so, it demonstrates how ritual, presence and ethics converge to underpin the transformative and emergent processes that foster and manage participation, while acknowledging the way that imposed sanctions serve to uphold the performance. Moreover, it maintains that spectator-participation has developed into a practice in its own right, and charts the birth of a new breed of spectator who anticipates the possibility of co-creation. It recognises several emerging types of participant, namely the "expert participant-spectator" and the more transgressive "dis-spectator". The thesis establishes that participation can offer spectators a licence to act in ways outside of their everyday political and social reality, at the same time; it calls attention to the lack of consideration and after-care given to spectators post-participation.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 The First Encounter: La Pocha Nostra's *Ex Centris* (2003)

It is March 2003. I am attending an exhibition entitled *Live Culture* at the Tate Modern, in partnership with the Live Art Development Agency. It is here that I have my first encounter with spectator-participation in the work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña¹ and his performance group, La Pocha Nostra. As I step into the “total” environment² of *Ex-Centris (A Living Diorama of Fetish-ized Others)*, I witness a series of intercultural specimens displayed on raised platforms of varying heights. The exhibits parody and subvert colonial modes of representation, enhanced by a heady mix of live and recorded music, multiple video projections, lighting effects, embalmed animals, and old-fashioned and popular culture artefacts. In this heightened state I notice Gómez-Peña attracting a small crowd of spectators around an emerging diorama, as he attempts to construct a “human mural”³ with the more adventurous audience members (See Gómez-Peña 2005: 83-84, and 119-120). He beseeches onlookers: “Is there anyone who is willing to co-create with me?” and I find myself drawn into his commanding presence. In an uncharacteristic moment of spontaneity, I volunteer to participate.

It was with some trepidation that I left my fellow spectators and made my way to the raised platform. I knew that in crossing the border⁴ I had entered into an invisible contract and I was wary of them taking more than I was willing to give. I was thereupon

¹ Chicano performance artist, writer, activist, and teacher, Guillermo Gómez-Peña has produced many seminal performance art pieces. The most infamous is *The Couple in the Cage* with Coco Fusco (1992-1993). He is the director of the performance group La Pocha Nostra.

² See Guillermo Gómez-Peña (2005: 81) for an explanation of how they create a “total” environment.

³ A “human mural” involves staging a series of shifting “tableaux vivants” or “living pictures”. See Guillermo Gómez-Peña (2005: 83-84, and 119-120) for further details on the “human mural” exercise.

⁴ The “border” that I am referring to throughout the thesis is the spatial divide between the audience and the performance.

greeted by a female La Pocha Nostra member, who quietly asked me if I would mind “losing” some of my clothes. In the hours that preceded my crossing I had witnessed La Pocha Nostra’s aesthetic, and it could be said that I felt a “special complicity”⁵ with their work. Nonetheless, the idea of stripping off in public was both exhilarating and unnerving, and I felt compelled to retain some control over the situation. It was agreed that I would lose my top, but with the condition that I could put it back on whenever I wished. Beyond the border, I was beginning to draw up my own boundaries.

Over the duration of my encounter, an ever-evolving group of participants lost their clothes and to a greater extent their everyday identities as we improvised a series of shifting tableaux vivants in response to suggestions given by Gómez-Peña and the watching-spectators, which included “a Postcard to President Bush” and “The End of the World”. There was a strong feeling of togetherness amongst my community of co-participants, and a kind of telepathy developed between our bodies as we created in the moment. At last, Gómez-Peña declared that we had found the “final image”, and the diorama revealed my half-naked body, complete with Native American headdress, in a co-dependant pose with a naked female, who was wearing a Mexican hat and armed with a replica machine gun (see Figure 1).

⁵ See Adam Alston (2013: 129) for an insightful account of Michael Fried’s expression “special complicity” (1968: 127) in relation to participation.



Figure 1: The “final image” of *Ex Centris*. Photo: Hugo Glendinning.⁶

I recall the sensation and colour of her skin against mine, our difference all the more visible through our co-presence. In crossing the border I had been transformed into an Other;⁷ I had “lost” my clothes, my identity, and I was on the other side of the performance. By now a number of journalists and photographers had joined the large crowd of spectators. As my muscles strained to maintain the image, and with my gaze transfixed in the distance, a sea of cameras flashed and snapped: this was my “fifteen minutes”.⁸ And then the performance was over, and as I struggled to gather up both my thoughts and clothes, my fellow participants had dispersed into the crowd, beyond my recognition.

⁶ The source for the image is (Gómez-Peña 2005: 121).

⁷ The term “Other” is used here as constructed in Colonial discourse, as ‘crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that informs the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization’ (Bhabha, 1994: 67).

⁸ This expression is taken from Andy Warhol, who notoriously said that “everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes” in the program for a 1968 exhibition of his work at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden.

In the ‘aftermath’⁹ of the performance, I felt euphoric and transformed by my embodied knowledge. However, this was shortly followed by a sense of loss and displacement, as on returning to the audience it quickly became apparent that my newly acquired celebrity was short-lived. Gómez-Peña states:

Once the performance is over and people walk away, my hope is that a process of reflection gets triggered in their perplexed psyches. If the performance is effective (I didn’t say good, but effective), this process can last for several weeks, even months. The questions and dilemmas embodied in the images and rituals I present can continue to haunt the spectator’s dreams, memories, and conversations. (2005: 25)

It is this ‘haunting’ that Gómez-Peña refers to, which underpins my analysis as I continue to wrestle with the complexities of my experience.

1.2 General Introduction and Aims

This thesis is offered as a timely and open-eyed examination of the emancipation of spectators within participatory live art. The title refers to ‘the morning after (the night before)’ in recognition of the mixed emotions¹⁰ which can arise as a result of one’s encounter with participation. But, more generally, the title adopts this well-known phrase to suggest that after an abundance of participatory works, we are entering a period of awakening whereupon we can reflect on the implications and possibilities of this practice.

Since the turn of the Millennium there has been a sea change in the production of contemporary performance and the visual arts towards more participatory, interactive and immersive forms of spectatorship. The increasing number of invitations for

⁹ The term ‘aftermath’ ‘is the long term consequences or follow-through of a performance’, as defined by Richard Schechner (1985: 19).

¹⁰ These mixed emotions are detailed in section 3.12: ‘Consequences and Potentialities of “Playing”’, and include euphoria, embarrassment and regret.

audiences to participate or collaborate in performance has led to *Time Out* offering a dedicated ‘Immersive theatre in London’ listing. I suggest that we are now at a juncture where the proliferation of participatory practice and the upsurge in critical dialogue surrounding participatory aesthetics (evident in the writings of Jacques Rancière, Nicholas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop, Jen Harvie, Josephine Machon, Adam Alston, and Gareth White, amongst others) enable us to take stock of what is given and what is taken when the audience is invited to participate in the art.

This thesis aims to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the function and effects of participatory practice in live art. It will examine the processes, pleasures and potential pitfalls of inviting the audience to co-create the art. The investigation works to elucidate new insights on established discussions surrounding participation, and to draw attention to several important areas of analysis which currently lack research. As such, it will acknowledge the significance of concepts such as ritual, presence and ethics on participation, and afford them the consideration that they deserve. The thesis offers a new way of looking at the phenomenology of participatory live art by determining these encounters as a complex network of contradictory and interdependent relations, underlined by the “paradox of participation”: the duality of holding the position of both performer and spectator at the same time. Accordingly, it argues that these performances constitute a “symmathesy” of participation, to use Nora Bateson’s term, which should be viewed as a whole experience rather than as a series of parts. This thesis also proposes an emerging field of spectator-participation as a practice in its own right. Accordingly, it charts the birth of a new breed of spectator, whose needs, sensitivities, boundaries, and perceptions have evolved along with the escalating ambitions and innovations of practitioners working with the audience. It follows a

growing expectation amongst spectators of live art to co-create with the artist, to ‘do something’, and a tendency to see themselves not just as audience members, but as ‘insiders’ and ‘part-time’ artists (Gómez-Peña 2005: 54). My analysis considers the specialist skills, attributes, and ethical code that underscore what it means to ‘give good audience’ as a participant-spectator (Heddon, Iball, Zerihan 2012: 124). It also determines how participation can create a hierarchy amongst spectators, as well as giving rise to “expert participant-spectators” and the more transgressive “dis-spectator”.

The notion of “the emancipated spectator” as outlined by Jacques Rancière (2007, 2009) informs many of the arguments that concern audience participation, and my study is no exception. However, this thesis goes beyond Rancière’s theory situated in the context of the theatre, to reconsider its meaning from the perspective of live art. As a live art audience is frequently freed from a seated position in a darkened auditorium, my consideration of emancipation is largely directed at the binary of activity and passivity in relation to the spectator’s role. It works to offer another insight on “the emancipated spectator” in the guise of the participant who is released from their everyday social and political reality, even if only until the performance ends.

There are varying forms of participatory practice belonging to live art, including one-to-one performance, relational art, social works, and immersive theatre. My analysis focuses on some of the most extreme models of audience participation employed in the work of three leading live artists and companies: Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s performance group La Pocha Nostra, Marina Abramović, and Gob Squad. These practitioners have been at the forefront of experiments with the audience and they continue to pioneer new strategies to foster participation. The performance works selected for discussion can all

be described as what Claire Bishop calls “delegated performance” (2008: 111), in the way that they invite spectators to complete the work. The case study performances that I will examine do not neatly fit into any singular definition of participatory practice; however, they all share a desire to engage the audience socially and through an embodied experience. They also acknowledge the presence of a watching-spectator, which I suggest both complicates and adds a further dimension to the notion of the emancipated spectator.

Alongside my critical analysis as a scholar, this study will draw on the embodied knowledge that I have gained from three perspectives: as a performing-spectator, a watching-spectator, and as an artist collaborator. The discussion explores these varying roles in what follows; drawing on the anecdotal evidence of my own encounters alongside the analysis of critical theories emerging from live art, performance studies, philosophy and the visual arts. Together these perspectives will interpret an aesthetic of participation within a contemporary social and cultural context, to reveal the ways in which participation can be socially and politically enabling, but also limiting and divisive.

In this introductory chapter I will outline my research methodology, as well as identify trends and developments in the field of immersive and participatory practice. This is followed by a tracing of the origins of spectator-participation within live art and related forms. I suggest that there are important lessons to be learnt from the past, which have impacted on more recent artistic models. This leads me to introduce the case study artists at the centre of this investigation and how their work connects with earlier and current practices in participation. In the penultimate section I offer a survey of

noteworthy books, journal editions, and other study resources which are indicative of the ways in which the field has developed. Lastly, I offer a map of the thesis and an overview of the chapters that structure my investigation.

1.3 Methodology

From the early 2000s onwards there has been a burgeoning interest in audience participation from artists, curators, critics and commentators working inside and outside of live art, at a time when there has been a prevalence of interactive forms in popular culture more widely. Consequently, there has been a range of discourses deployed within and about participation from scholars working within the fields of performance studies, live art, contemporary visual art, and philosophy. Although the case studies under discussion are firmly situated within live art, they are also placed in dialogue with theoretical frameworks and scholarly discourses that mediate between art forms. While conducting a survey of literature on participation I have noted a frequent separation between theoretical writing around the work and the work itself. Even though I recognise that it can be helpful to distinguish between the perceptions of those that make the work and those that critique it; it is my intention to bring these perceptions together in the writing of this thesis. Therefore, I will be adopting the triple perspective of the spectator that experiences the work, the artist who makes the work, and the scholar who analyses it within the wider context of contemporary critical theory. I suggest that there are complex interactions to be found between these viewpoints, which extend understandings of participatory practice and its affective capacity. Together these varying insights aim to present a complete look at these complex interactions.

It is significant that each chapter begins with an anecdote of a participatory encounter that I have experienced because it places the work itself as the catalyst for that section of the study. Indeed, I discovered over the course of my investigation that rather than acting as a prelude to the “real” scholarly research being presented, these accounts were actually key to unlocking the pertinent themes and critical concepts to be pursued in relation to participation. Bridging the gap between the practice and the theory, this thesis locates my embodied knowledge as a spectator, in dialogue with the theoretical frameworks that surround participation.

Since beginning this doctoral study, I have noted an increasing trend amongst academics in the field to use a combination of first-person accounts alongside scholarly writing (Jordan 2016: 116).¹¹ This two-pronged analysis of participation can be seen to replicate the duality of the participant-spectator’s role both inside and outside of the performance.¹² The use of first person accounts to underscore discussions on participatory and immersive work was particularly striking at the 24th Annual Conference of the German Society for Contemporary Drama in English (CDE) on “Theatre and Spectatorship”, hosted in Barcelona, June 2015.¹³ These researchers demonstrate the way that participatory performance transforms the spectator into a narrator of their own experience. Furthermore, they may be seen to represent an example of Rancière’s notion that: ‘[a]n emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers’ (2007: 280). However, as Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte note, the

¹¹ There are some arguments within the thesis which first appeared in my Journal article for the *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English* (JCDE) 4(1), May, 2016, entitled: ‘On the Border of Participation: Spectatorship and the Interactive Rituals of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra’.

¹² This condition of duality is discussed in section 3.3 and referred to as “the paradox of participation”.

¹³ A notable amount of scholars including myself, Josephine Machon, Gareth White, Adam Alston, and Holly Maples incorporated anecdotal evidence into their conference papers.

stress on community ‘might be perceived to stand in tension with a recurrent emphasis in scholarly reflections on immersive, participatory work on the *individual* journey undertaken by each spectator-participant’ (2016: 8 emphasis original). Indeed, the significance of participation as a personal experience is indicative of the way in which these performances ultimately bring forth an encounter with the self.¹⁴

An embodied approach to the study of participatory performance echoes Diana Taylor’s methodology, as outlined in her 2003 book *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Here Taylor states: ‘Performance, for me, functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis (2003: xvi)’. It is also situated within the expanding field of Spectator-Participation-as-Research (SPaR), a term coined by Deidre Heddon, Helen Iball and Rachel Zerihan (2012: 122). In this thesis, SPaR is applied to all three case studies from the perspectives of a participant-spectator (to varying degrees), watching-spectator, and as a collaborative artist with La Pocha Nostra during a ten-day residency programme in Tucson, Arizona (2007).¹⁵

Building on from the idea that the study of participation requires a personal approach, there are also a number of researchers who are making a timely contribution to empirical audience research on participation.¹⁶ As Helen Freshwater notes in *Theatre & Audience* (2009), this research methodology has been conspicuously ‘absent from theatre studies’ (2009: 29). Astrid Breel’s investigation into ‘Audience agency in

¹⁴ Participation as self-encounter is a reoccurring theme throughout the thesis, but particularly in sections 3.12, and 4.6-4.9.

¹⁵ La Pocha Nostra invited twenty-six international artists/academics to join them for an intensive residency programme in Tucson, Arizona, supported by the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA). The participants were introduced to the company’s radical performance pedagogy, working towards the realisation of a three-hour durational performance.

¹⁶ The themed section on ‘Theatre Audiences’ for *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, May 2015, features several projects that draw on empirical research methods, including by Kirsty Sedgman, Astrid Breel and Julie Wilkinson.

participatory performance: A methodology for examining aesthetic experience' (2015) takes a 'mixed-method approach' influenced by Participatory Action Research (PAR), which stresses 'a socially constructed reality within which multiple interpretations of a single phenomenon are possible by both researchers and participants' (Kind, Pain and Kesby, 2007: 13 in Breel 2015: 371). This emphasis on 'collaborative knowledge production' corresponds with the multiplicity of interpretation that participatory practices are known to produce, and resists a single analytical perspective (Ibid). This new direction by scholars has introduced some valuable processes in collecting data on participants' experiences, as well as revealing some interesting responses. However, my methodology aims to unravel new understandings of participatory practice beginning first and foremost with my own experience of the case study performances. This strategy also supports my view that in all of the debates and critiques that surround participation, we shouldn't lose sight of the *experience itself*.

Nevertheless, I do not claim to speak for all spectators when I evaluate the performances under discussion, as each spectator will have their own unique perspective on their encounter. Shannon Jackson observes in her book *Social Works: Performing art, supporting publics* (2011):

Our evaluations of work depend not only upon critical histories but also upon disciplinary perceptual habits that can make for drastically different understandings of what we are in fact encountering. Perceptions of stasis, durationality, passivity and activity, stillness and action, might well be in the eye (and body) of the beholder. (2011: 4)

Reflecting on my position as a researcher, I acknowledge that my background in contemporary theatre, performance studies, and live art gives the research a particular methodological slant. Therefore, in my reading of the case studies I am inclined to draw on critical concepts that emerge from and are regularly applied to these fields. This also

explains why some established critiques regarding participation are not attended to in great detail in this study, notably discourse around interactivity and digital performance. My interest lies with participatory encounters that are founded primarily as a “live”, face-to-face exchange between bodies, rather than as a purely technology-based experience; notwithstanding the fact that all of the case studies to some extent incorporate technology into the fabric of the work.

The emphasis on a live encounter between bodies converges with processes associated with phenomenology and interpretation. Therefore, connections can be made with aspects of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in my approach to research. IPA is a recent and rapidly developing qualitative study method that examines ‘experience in its own terms’, particularly, important encounters that interrupt the flow of everyday life (J. A. Smith, Flowers and Larking 2009: 1). While one could argue that all performance takes place in a liminal space outside of daily life, the experiences made available through the works in this study constitute a much more affective interruption from our everyday existence. In the crossing of the border between the performance space and the audience space we are given access to other roles and personas that go beyond our normal sense of self.

IPA is founded on a hierarchy of experience; at the lowest level it suggests that we continuously and unselfconsciously engage in the everyday course of experience, whereas as soon as we become self-conscious of what is happening we ascend to what might be defined as “an experience” rather than just experience (J. A. Smith, Flowers and Larking, 2009, 2). In this way, all of the self-reflexive anecdotes that permeate this study are a testament to these encounters as an experience. Typically in IPA, when an

individual is engaged with an experience they reflect on what is happening to them and the researcher aims to interpret these reflections (Ibid., 3). As Jonathan A Smith and his co-authors note:

IPA shares the view that human beings are sense-making creatures, and therefore the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience. IPA also recognizes that access to experience is always dependant on what participants tell us about that experience, and that the researcher then needs to interpret that account from the participant in order to understand their experience. (Ibid)

This process of interpretation also becomes a phenomenological act in itself, as the participant is imprinted on the researcher, who attempts to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them. On the one hand, the researcher finds themselves employing the same conceptual skills as the participant, but on the other hand, they use these skills ‘more self-consciously and systematically’ (Ibid). However, as Breel points out, IPA is limited by the fact that while the participant’s ‘reflection and articulation develops the “original” experience’ in order to make sense of it, it is inevitable that some of the complexity and affective nature of that experience will be lost in translation (2015: 372). Nonetheless, although first-person accounts of participation cannot fully impart the “original” experience, they do enable us to further understand the ways in which the participant makes sense of their exchange.

My application of IPA differs from its usual usage in the respect that I am both the participant and the researcher simultaneously, which in a sense reflects the doubling of the performer/spectator role that comes into being during participatory performance. This duality within the research methodology lacks the objectivity that one would expect to find in IPA, although I have gained a new perspective on my written accounts as time has passed. Yet, it should be acknowledged that the anecdotal evidence that I

offer throughout the thesis is embodied with theoretical knowledge, which alters my perception of the *experience itself*. As Rachel Gomme concedes when discussing her subjective analysis of one-to-one performance: ‘My encounter is already being shaped by external structure and my own preconceptions, including, for myself as seasoned spectator, a degree of critical detachment that perhaps closes down the potential for intimate sharing’ (2015: 289). Likewise, it is evident that the more ‘seasoned’ in participation I have become, the less I have been inclined to physically interact in the work. However, in contrast, there are spectators who foster a greater attachment to participation because of their accumulated experience, as discussed in chapter three. Reflection and articulation concerning my first encounter with La Pocha Nostra is further complicated by “the document performance”,¹⁷ to use Rebecca Schneider’s term (Schneider 117-120 in Brine and Minton 2008). This has emerged in the form of both photographs and film footage which capture my participation; strengthening and potentially distorting my recollection of the live performance. Nevertheless, my variation on IPA, adopting both the position of the participant and the researcher, has the advantage that I can never be wholly divorced from the *experience itself* because the experience belongs to me.

In recognising the limitations of my participatory experiences as primary research, I also wanted to incorporate the views of the artists responsible for making these works. This perspective was readily available from Gómez-Peña and Abramović, who have both authored several books and are frequently documented by others, as well as being

¹⁷ “The document performance” is a concept defined by Rebecca Schneider which distinguishes that the documentation of a performance is a performance in its own right. As such, it is received by an audience in its own time and space, while maintaining a connection to the original event. See (Schneider 117-120 in Brine and Minton 2008) for a full explanation.

regular users of online social networks. Gob Squad, however, are not as well represented by publications; thus, to maintain a balance between the artists that feature in this study I requested an interview with core member, Sharon Smith.

The 50-minute interview with Smith took place via Skype (see appendices), and usefully informs the writing throughout chapter five. It could also be said that this research method corresponds with IPA as a form of ‘collaborative knowledge production’. IPA regularly employs individual interviews, lasting typically forty-five to sixty minutes. The style of questions is often self-selecting to enable a particular perspective, and they focus on the participant’s sense-making of their experience (J. A. Smith, Flowers and Larking 2009: 49). However, I conducted a structured interview with Smith, to cover a range of different aspects concerning participatory performance. Still, at the same time, this approach converged with IPA in the way that both Smith and I shared our individual readings of the two case study productions, and in turn interpreted each other’s perception of those experiences.

The combination of research methods applied during this study aim to investigate participatory practice in live art on a number of different levels. Together, they enable moments of comparison, connection and departure between these perspectives, to reveal new understandings of this exciting and emergent field of performance.

1.4 Why Live Art?

“Live art” is a slippery term which avoids simple categorisation, partly as a consequence of its “liveness”.¹⁸ It was first introduced by Lois Keidan in a strategy

¹⁸ “Liveness” itself is a difficult term and one that has been debated, most notably in the seminal contributions by Peggy Phelan’s 1993 study *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* and Philip Auslander’s 1999 book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*.

document that she authored in 1991 for the Arts Council of Great Britain. Here she outlined current practices, provisions and issues for live art, and notably adopted the term “live art” to define a set of practices and cultural strategies that were apparent in the UK at the time. While the artists at the centre of this study are not full-time UK residents, all of them have been major contributors to the live art scene in the UK. It is to Keidan that I turn, as Director of the Live Art Development Agency (LADA), for a workable definition: ‘Live Art is a research engine, driven by artists who are working across forms, contexts and spaces to open up new artistic models, new languages for the representation of ideas and identities, and new strategies for intervening in the public sphere’ (Live Art Development Agency 2016). The emphasis on research and newness in this ever expanding field continue to locate its practices at the cutting edge of contemporary performance and the visual arts.

In an article for *The Guardian* (2015), Keidan describes live art as ‘the research lab for mass culture’ and suggests that ‘if you want to know what the mainstream will be up to in 10 years’ time, just look at what Live Art is doing now’. I propose that the artistic models, languages and strategies for engaging the audience that are pioneered within live art provide us with a unique vantage point for determining new understandings of audience participation. Changes in audiences themselves, their expectations, needs, sensibilities and boundaries, have meant that artists have had to reconsider their role and that of the spectator in performance. Adrian Heathfield (2004) identifies immediate, immersive, and interactive art as some of the recurrent lines of practice and thought to define the contemporary live art scene. Following Heathfield, these new forms

necessitate a review of the concepts of embodied existence and relation that have so intrigued the practice of experimental performance (Heathfield 2004: 8).

1.5 Tracing the Origins of Participation in Live Art

In the late 1990s the development of new interactive technologies created a wave of mediated and virtual art projects where participation occurred remotely. However, as Gómez-Peña has noted, the performance artist Stelarc's early warning in the 1990s that 'the body (was) becoming obsolete' has proved unfounded (2005: 25-26). Instead, virtual reality appears to have fuelled audiences' appetite for "real" intervention with "real" bodies. As Gómez-Peña states: 'It is simply impossible to replace the ineffable magic of a pulsating, sweaty body immersed in a live ritual in front of our eyes' (Ibid). Similarly, Heddon and her co-authors suggest that: 'The intimacy proffered by live performances has previously been framed as "real", and a deliberate intervention into and resistance to the "virtual" relationships engineered via digital interfaces such as Facebook and Twitter' (2012: 121). Matthew Reason also asserts that: 'participation enables theatre to (re)assert its essential liveness, in opposition to mediatisation, with interactivity and immersion very much dependent on spatial and temporal co-presence' (2015: 273). At the heart of this research, are participatory works that attempt to create a real exchange of selves within the shared time and space of performance.¹⁹ Richard Schechner interprets the rebirth of participatory practice in the 1990s by acknowledging that: 'The theater is a particularly sensitive measurement of social feeling and action. It is also a holdout, technologically speaking: the last of the hand-crafted entertainments'

¹⁹ Auslander's *Liveness* (1999) unravels the way in which theatrical immediacy is seen to authenticate a performance as a representation of real life. However, he argues against the presupposition that the live is real and the mediated is unreal.

(1994: 45); while the resurgence towards participation in live art, at the turn of the Millennium, was partly in response to what was becoming an ever increasing mediated and de-politicised society. It was also fuelled by a growing desire amongst artists to connect with their audience, at a time when there were few performance spaces and limited funding available for live art.

Home Live Art (HLA), founded by Laura Godfrey Isaacs in 1999, was an important step in the development of the participatory revival. In its original conception it was Godfrey Isaacs' own family house in Camberwell that was the site of HLA's public exhibitions and art projects. HLA's Salon Series (2000-2005) focused on 'intimate works that explored the unique domestic context, the relationship between art and life, and the dynamic between site, performer and audience' (HLA 2012). It became an important stage for both emerging and established artists including Kira O'Reilly, Bobby Baker, Marisa Carnesky and Helena Goldwater, as a major commissioning body for live art with national significance. What is pertinent for this thesis about HLA is its emphasis on participatory practice as an underlying principle.²⁰ For this reason, it used a non-institutional space to bring art and life together in a new relationship, pushing the boundaries of artistic practice and redefining the roles of artist and spectator. The domestic setting of Godfrey Isaacs' home negated the familiar rules of engagement that are usually found in a gallery or performance space. Spectators were encouraged and more inclined to roam around the space and interact with the exhibitions and performances taking place.

²⁰ See Home Live Art 2016.

Along with HLA, LADA should also be acknowledged for its influential role in promoting participatory practices. Since its conception in 1999 it has been instrumental in curating a number of high profile public events and exhibitions that have taken live art to a wider audience. These have frequently featured artists at the forefront of spectator-participation, including patrons Gómez-Peña and Abramović. One such event was the *Live Culture* (2003) exhibition at the Tate Modern, where I first encountered La Pocha Nostra.

Expanding on the emergence of participatory practices on the UK live art scene, this section illustrates how there is a rich history of audience participation within experimental performance practices.²¹ In particular, as Erika Fischer-Lichte highlights, the performance experiments of the late 1960s and early 1970s provided the foundation for later artistic models between artist and spectator (2008: 44). I propose that by looking back at these earlier manifestations of participation, it develops our understanding of how the field has evolved into what it is today. I also suggest that there are lessons to be learnt from these performances, in terms of the possibilities and limitations of participation. Yet, I wish to stress that this investigation does not profess to be a historical study into the emergence of participatory performance, and this is by no means an exhaustive account. Audience participation has a long lineage, which has usefully been documented in Josephine Machon's *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (2013), Bishop's *Participation* (2006), Rudolf Frieling and Boris Groys' *The Art of participation: 1950 to Now* (2008), and

²¹ Techniques and sensibilities associated with participatory practice have existed in a broad range of rituals and theatre practices. Josephine Machon helpfully traces this inheritance, see (2013: 28-40). In particular, she highlights the Modernist period, specifically the emergence of interdisciplinary practice and the 'development of a sensibility' (Goldberg 1996: 46: 9 in Machon 2013: 29).

Susan Kattwinkel's edited collection *Audience Participation: Essays on inclusion in performance* (2003).

It is widely acknowledged that some of the most pioneering experiments with the audience began in the "Happenings" of the late 1960s and 1970s, which were founded in New York and expanded to Europe and the UK.²² What is significant about these works is that in almost all happenings there was an attempt 'to alter the audience-presentation relationship, as we have generally known it, and to use this relationship artistically' (Kirby 1995 [1965]: 14). This impulse stemmed from a desire to increase the immediacy of the event and to heighten the spectator's attention (Ibid).

Allan Kaprow is recognised as a leading figure in happenings, but he also produced what he referred to as "activities". As Laura Cull explains in her 2011 article: 'Attention-training: Immanence and ontological participation in Kaprow, Deleuze and Bergson', these undertakings often took place in private houses, similar to HLA. The activities were written scores that invited participants to carry out various mundane actions and interactions that were 'made strange through a variety of compositional devices' (Cull 2011: 80). In the beginning the activities consisted of 'mindless' tasks where the outcome was predetermined (Ibid., 85). However, Kaprow evolved his practice to become: 'a process of co-authorship through which an audience is actively "collaborating in the art making and meaning making process" (Kaprow 1991: 52), where "meaning" is understood by Kaprow as "lived change" or "experienced insight" rather than interpretation' (Cull 2011: 85). Cull locates Kaprow's use of audience engagement at the extreme end of *a continuum of participation* (2011), with the artist's

²² See Michael Kirby's definition of "Happenings" (1995 [1965]: 3).

role as the author reduced to a minimum and the spectator given the maximum amount of responsibility possible for determining the direction of the work (Ibid emphasis original).

Cull also highlights how Kaprow became aware that looking or “attention”²³ is different when the audience is simultaneously involved in the production of the work (2011: 86). He states:

Watching and listening in the midst of doing is very distinct from the specialized observations of a physically passive audience (only the mind is awake for a traditional audience, at best; and it has no responsibility for the actual work. It can only judge). (Kaprow 1986: unpaginated in Cull 2011: 86)

Therefore, Kaprow redefined the role of the audience as the ‘direct, physical involvement’ of those who wish to take part in the action (Ibid). He perceived of their attention in action as what he terms “experienced insight”, which resists any mind-body distinction and constitutes embodied thinking: ‘Meaning is experienced in the body, and the mind is set into play by the body’s sensations’ (Ibid). His reconceptualising of participation as a form of knowledge production that is felt is indicative of participation as a phenomenological experience. It also converges with Gómez-Peña’s hope that after the performance is over a process of reflection is sparked in the spectator’s psyche (2005: 25).

Happenings and activities are a direct antecedent of “performance art”, and it is within this tradition that we find further ground-breaking forms of spectator-participation. Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece*,²⁴ provides one of the first powerful examples of one-to-one performance, albeit in front of a watching audience. During this artwork the

²³ See section 2.9 for Cull’s appropriation of Henri Bergson’s writing on “attention”, to reconsider the relationship between participation and observation.

²⁴ *Cut Piece* premiered at Yamaichi Concert Hall, Kyoto, in 1964.

audience is invited to individually come up on stage to cut a small piece of the artist's clothing to take away with them (Frieling, Groys 2008: 108). Documentation of the performance (photographs and video) depict Ono sitting motionless, modestly attempting to cover her exposed breasts with her hands. Art Critic, Martha Schwendener has described the piece as 'more like a rape than an art performance' (in Bryan-Wilson 2003: 103). Reflecting on the experience, Ono states:

It was a form of giving, giving and taking. It was a kind of criticism against artists, who are always giving what they want to give. I wanted people to take whatever they wanted to, so it was very important to say you can cut wherever you want to. ... That's a form of total giving as opposed to reasonable giving like "logically you deserve this" or "I think this is good, therefore I am giving this to you." (Ono in Perry R and Elliott T 1967: 26–27)

She reproduced the performance several times with significant alterations, and it was reprised in 2003 at Paris's Ranelagh Theatre, indicative of a renewed interest in these earlier participatory works.

Schechner and his company The Performance Group (TPG) were also influenced by Kaprow's experiments with participation, as well as drawing on Schechner's own research into ritual, particularly Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960).²⁵ Schechner believed that the audience should take a more active role within performance, subsequently TPG created several infamous participatory performances; the most famous of which is *Dionysus in 69* (1969). According to Schechner, the group didn't plan the audience participation beforehand; it just developed in a way that meant that nearly all of the scenes required some level of spectator involvement (Schechner 1994: 40). However, the audience did not always participate in the way that Schechner and his collaborators imagined. Spectators frequently abused their new found freedom,

²⁵ Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960) are defined in section 3.9.

and there were complaints that female performers felt victimised and sexually exploited (Schechner 1973: 42 in Fischer-Lichte 2008: 42). On one occasion a group of college students kidnapped the performer playing Pentheus to prevent his sacrifice to Dionysus, resulting in arguments breaking out between many spectators, and Pentheus being dumped on Grand Street and refusing to return to the performance (Schechner 1994: 41). Schechner states:

I remember my confusion about the performance. The Group was upstairs scrubbing off stage blood and arguing with spectators, including the Queens College “kidnappers.” I was elated that’s something “real” had happened. I didn’t think it was wrong that the students planned their actions. After all, if the performers rehearse, why shouldn’t the audience? And I was excited by the aftermath: the discussions, the confrontations, the meeting between performers and spectators on new ground. At that time I didn’t know the depth of hurt and anger that some performers felt. (Ibid)

I wish to suggest that it is the promise of something “real” happening that makes participatory work an exciting proposition for both artists and spectators.

For Schechner, participation in *Dionysus in 69* adopted a democratic process that envisaged spectators as co-subjects, allowing them to contribute to the story rather than obediently comply with a predetermined set of instructions. Consequently, it heightened the spontaneity and liveness of the event, and produced strong reactions in both spectators and performers. But, it also emphasised the potential pitfalls of operating an open model of participation. While the redistribution of power may give life to the emancipated spectator, it can simultaneously render the performer powerless. As Schechner tells us, ‘most of the performers had had it with participation’ by the time that *Dionysus in 69* finished its run that summer (1994: 44). Consequently, in TPG’s 1970 production of *Commune*, he had altered his approach to focus on the performers’ ability to pressure and manipulate the spectators (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 42).

Continuing with the legacy of participatory performance in the 1970s, Chris Burden's 1971 *Five Day Locker Piece*²⁶ is identified by Zerihan as the first recorded one-to-one performance which excludes a watching audience (Zerihan 2006: 7). Zerihan states: 'Confining himself, without food or drink, to a two by two by three foot locker for five days established an environment that his audience read as encouraging their communication with him in a secure and outwardly intimate space' (2006: 4). Zerihan argues that the relationship established between artist and spectator in *Locker Piece* provides a useful analytical framework for exploring the complicated dynamic of close interaction in contemporary one-to-one practices.

Burden's later work *Doomed* (1975)²⁷ gained much notoriety as a crucial lesson in the way that spectators engage with art. What is poignant about this forty-five hour and ten minute work is that it ended at the moment of participation. In this piece, Burden set a clock on a wall for midnight and lay down on the floor under a sheet of glass that was leaning against the wall. Burden remained still (unavoidably he soiled his pants) as viewers came and went. His discomfort was finally relieved when a young museum employee, Dennis O'Shea, placed a container of water within Burden's reach. In response to this small but meaningful act, the artist stood up, smashed the clock with a hammer and left the gallery. In *Doomed* we see how the conventional distance between artwork and viewer can prevent spectators from acting on their own ethical responsibility.

²⁶ *Five Day Locker Piece* was performed at the University of California, Irvine, as part of Burden's master's thesis.

²⁷ *Doomed* was performed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

This brings me to one of the most infamous examples of audience participation in contemporary performance, Abramović's *Rhythm 0* (1974).²⁸ This artwork has become a cautionary tale for artists working with participation. It is difficult to think of a more shocking demonstration of what a participatory audience can do. In this work there were 72 items displayed on a table, including objects of desire and objects of pain. The artist invited spectators to use these items as they so wished for the duration of six hours. By the end of the performance, Abramović was naked, her skin was slashed and wounded, and a loaded gun had been held to her head (Goldberg 2001: 165). This piece suggests the potential dangers of participation, as Abramović tells us: 'if you leave it up to the audience, they can kill you' (Abramović *et al*: 2002: 29).

My tracing of the origins of participation in live art has revealed how the democratic relationship between artist and spectator, advocated in the experiments of the 1960s and 1970s, was undermined by the way that democracy could descend into rebellion and abuse. Therefore, Ono's notion of participation as an act of 'total giving' has largely been replaced by artists as a form of 'reasonable giving'. Nonetheless, although artists working now may be more wary of the risks of participation, recent models of practice take the audience to new limits. This thesis will demonstrate how the participatory practices cultivated by artists today continue in the footprints of the earlier pioneers of participation; however, it also signifies that the social and cultural context, formal language, and audience have changed with the times.

²⁸ *Rhythm 0* was performed at Studio Morra in Naples.

1.6 Introduction to Case Studies: Guillermo Gómez-Peña's La Pocha Nostra, Marina Abramović, and Gob Squad

The case study artists and performance groups at the centre of this study have been selected because they epitomise some of the most striking and complex examples of recent participatory practice in live art. Importantly, I have also experienced their work first-hand, which enables me to offer both an embodied and academic response to their work. Given that the impetus for this research project arose from my experience as a participant-spectator in La Pocha Nostra's work, they were a clear choice as a case study. Additionally, the subsequent encounters that I have had with their practice, most notably as a collaborator, have offered me a unique insight into the emergent processes and effects of participation, from all sides of the performance border. One particular area of interest in their work is the presence of a performing-spectator and a watching-spectator, specifically how these roles relate to one another and to the practice. Another prominent characteristic is the way in which participation has been adopted as an instrument to mobilise the audience into engaging with the social and political concerns of the company. Indeed, while all of the case studies are socially engaged to some degree, La Pocha Nostra overtly frames their work as politically activist art, and it is this which underpins their modus operandi.

The group was founded in 1993 by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Roberto Sifuentes, and Nola Mariano and they have an office based in San Francisco. Their projects range from performance solos and duets to large-scale performance installations using video, DVD, photography, audio, and cyber art (Gómez-Peña 2005: 77). La Pocha Nostra are described by Gómez-Peña as: 'a conceptual "laboratory" – a loose association of rebel artists thinking together, exchanging ideas/aspirations, and jumping into "the abyss"

together' (2005: 78). Although the company are officially based in the US, they have had a substantial live art presence in the UK since 1999.

Audience participation is a notable feature within La Pocha Nostra's performances and is employed to directly engage spectators with border politics. Borders, both physical and conceptual, hold much significance for Gómez-Peña, and much of his art is created in response to his own struggle crossing the boundary between Mexico and the U.S, as well as challenging borders that exist politically, culturally and artistically. While Gómez-Peña's art originates from his own Latino perspective, it becomes localised for the audience of his practice, as they witness the border being brought into the mainland, metaphorically speaking. The main participatory element happens towards the end of La Pocha Nostra's performances in the form of an evolving human mural with participant-spectators, resulting in some of the most extreme scenes of spectator-participation found in live art.

The company refers to their large-scale performance installations as "interactive rituals" or "community rituals" for the new Millennium, indicative of participatory performance as a contemporary form of social ritual, discussed further in chapter three. This is one way in which La Pocha Nostra's artistic model of participation shares formal qualities with the earlier works of both TPG and Abramović. However, unlike Schechner, they do not attempt to establish a democratic relationship between all participants as co-subjects, nor do they overtly pressure and manipulate the spectators into participating. Instead, the co-creators are guided to participate under the watchful and overarching direction of Gómez-Peña and his company. Similar to *Rhythm 0*, there are multiple levels of participation employed in this work, as participants are

encouraged to take on both subjective and objective roles. Nonetheless, whereas spectators of *Rhythm 0* oscillated between participating in the action and spectating from the sidelines, La Pocha Nostra have developed a third mode of engagement in the form of the watching-directing-spectator, who offers live commentary and suggestions for the diorama.

A further aspect where these interactive rituals meet with *Rhythm 0* is through the use of objects. But, in La Pocha Nostra's productions the emphasis shifts from the artist's body to the spectator's body, as participants are invited to utilise a range of props, costumes and artefacts to re-invent their identities. This move represents a key development in the practice of participation; however, it has led to criticisms regarding the exploitative potential of using other people's bodies to complete the work (see Bishop 2008; see also Jen Harvie 2013).

The way that La Pocha Nostra expands earlier models of participation through their theatrical manifestations of postcolonial theory comes out of Gómez-Peña's unique approach to performance activism and knowing use of theory, discussed further in chapter three. Gómez-Peña has written extensively on his practice and the role of rebel artists within an oppressive culture, most notably in his books (see 2000, 2005 and 2011). This thesis will make considerable use of his 2005 publication *Ethno Techno*, which was written during the period in which the case study performances were produced. Furthermore, this text outlines the political and philosophical considerations that underpin his work, and serves as a declaration to participatory spectatorship as embodied knowledge production. I propose that it is the extreme transformation of participant-spectators, and their intense corporeal interactions with each other that

makes La Pocha Nostra's performances so distinctive. This thesis will examine the way that these interactive rituals challenge the limits of participation and demonstrate its transformative capacity to evoke social change. My investigation will focus on three of La Pocha Nostra's performance works: *Ex-Centris* (2003), *Mapa Corpo 2* (2006) and an untitled performance installation at the MOCA in Tucson, Arizona (2007).

Marina Abramović is the second case study artist under discussion, specifically her performance installation, *512 Hours* (2014), which provides a compelling and complex example of participation as a live exchange between bodies. Born in Belgrade in 1946, she crosses over from the earlier generation of performance artists to the contemporary live art scene. Experimenting with audience participation for over forty-years, Abramović has produced many game-changing artworks that have re-written the rules of what constitutes the bond between artist and spectator. Along with *Rhythm 0*, artworks such as *Imponderabilia* (1977), *The House with the Ocean View* (2002), and *The Artist is Present* (2010) offer notable examples of how the artist has redefined the way that the audience encounters art. The self-proclaimed "grandmother of performance art" has more than deserved her place in participatory performance history; thus, it is surprising that more has not been written about her practice in the wave of publications on participation. This may of course be because scholars feel that the celebrity-artist receives enough attention from the media and the general public. Abramović openly champions the role of the spectator as co-creator, proposing that: :

The public has to take a much more interactive position, has to become more of an experimenter and, together with the artist, has to develop the illumination of the state of mind, where ... the transmission of pure energy and a kind of wellbeing were the only things necessary. (Abramović cited in O'Brien 2014: 39 emphasis original)

One can chart the development of this philosophy through her practice, culminating in *512 Hours* (2014), which frames “the public as [the] main work” (Abramović in KunstSpektrum 2014).

512 Hours premiered at the Serpentine Gallery in the summer of 2014, where Abramović performed from 10am to 6pm, six days a week for 64 days. Chapter four analyses my encountering of this work, specifically looking at the relationship between participation and presence. Like the other case studies in this thesis, the inclusion of both a performing-spectator and watching-spectator was significant to my experience, and further develops my writing around “the paradox of participation”, introduced in chapter three. In addition, I highlight Abramović’s presence as a celebrity-artist and her ability to draw unparalleled audience figures to participation. The chapter looks at how *512 Hours* acts as a spectacle of sociability, offering a form of socially engaged live art which uses participation to unite the public and channel spectators’ passive resistance. Similar to Gómez-Peña’s troubles crossing the border of Mexico, Abramović’s non-acceptance of borders can be directly related to her personal experiences growing up in Yugoslavia’s repressive Communist dictatorship. Yet, while the performance art that she was making in the 1970s was clearly underpinned by political and social activism, this has become less explicit over the years with many of her more recent and most infamous works being predominately cathartic in tone. In this way, the research will consider how Abramović’s approach towards participation has developed into one of ‘reasonable giving’.

The final case study to inform this investigation is the performance company Gob Squad. In their book *Gob Squad and the Impossible Attempt To Make Sense of It All*

they state that: ‘Gob Squad has been interested in hauling the audience out of its passive observational role since the beginning. With each new project we have worked on further developing our relationship to the audience’ (Gob Squad 2010: 86). The seven-member, German-British troupe was founded in Nottingham in 1994, but are now primarily based in Berlin. Gob Squad’s Simon Wills identifies their practice as a hybrid of both performance art and theatre, stating: ‘Gob Squad often falls between those two things. We have a sense of drama and theatricality, but we also feel very in touch with a visual power and an atmospheric sensibility’ (Banks 2013). Therefore, they usefully meet with the histories, theories and conversations that span across these disciplines. This is informed by the interdisciplinary constitution of the group, as members have backgrounds in an array of creative arts. At the core of Gob Squad’s work is their interest in ‘where theatre meets art, media and real life’²⁹ (Gob Squad 2016a), which eventually led them to look to the audience. In their exploration of ‘[e]veryday life and magic, banality and utopia, reality and entertainment’ (Ibid) they have adopted several different models of spectator-participation. Their first substantial work to directly involve spectators was *Room Service* in 2003, in which the four performers’ only mode of contact to the outside world was a phone line to the audience. More recently their method of participation has focused on “remote acting”. This process requires the participant-spectator to wear a pair of headphones through which they will receive instructions on how to act. It is employed during their productions of *Kitchen (You’ve Never Had It So Good)* (2007), and in the two works that my analysis will concentrate on: *Western Society* (2013) and *War and Peace* (2016).

²⁹ Gob Squad’s work frequently embodies the debate launched by Phelan and Auslander, concerning liveness as real and the mediated as unreal.

Significantly, Gob Squad directly calls attention to the presence of the performing-spectator and the watching-spectator. However, unlike spectators in the previous case study works, Gob Squad's audience meet with Rancière's notion of "the emancipated spectator" set free from their seat in a darkened auditorium, which offers another perspective on how his philosophy might be advanced in the context of live art. Moreover, the way that participants are referred to as VIPs and given special treatment generates a thoughtful dialogue with discussions and debates that surround the status of participation as a place of privilege. While Gob Squad's work is not as intensely activist as La Pocha Nostra's performances, contemporary social and cultural politics pervade their productions and frame audience engagement. Furthermore, the way in which their practice works to bring strangers together on stage, parallels Abramović's impulse to connect the public. Nevertheless, whereas Abramović prohibits technology in *512 Hours*, Gob Squad utilise technology to further complicate the meaning of participation and how it manifests presence. The performance company are largely omitted from much of the discourse on participation, even though they have pioneered audience participation in UK-based devised theatre/ live art practice. This research seeks to fill that gap and to establish a dialogue with Gob Squad about the role of participation within their work.

Together the artists and performances that feature in this thesis will demonstrate that participation is a multifaceted process that has the capacity to produce a variety of audience responses, which range from obedience to dissidence. In this way, they usefully contribute to on-going debates surrounding the aesthetics, politics and phenomenology of participation. Moreover, as Keidan suggests, the artistic models and

modes of spectatorship founded in live art might also offer an insight into how artistic practices may evolve in the mainstream in the years to come.

1.7 Literature Survey on Participation

Since starting this investigation the growth in popularity of participatory practices has become apparent not only in the notable programming of interactive works, but through the attention that it has received in academia. In this literature survey I will highlight some of the key publications and events that have impacted this emerging field.

However, limitations of space prevent me from mentioning all of the writings that have influenced thinking around participation, even as I write there are publications that are newly released or on the horizon.³⁰ Nevertheless, while this overview of research will show the ways in which lines of enquiry and debates have developed over the years, it also reveals a number of key areas that currently lack sufficient consideration.

First of all, as a general point, although participation is overtly and inadvertently touched on within live art publications and journal articles, there is a dearth of literature devoted to live art and its audience(s). Thomas Frank and Mark Waugh's (2005) *We Love You: On Audiences* is an exception; it features a number of discussions on audiences that arose out of a two-day symposium held at the Goethe Institut London in 2004, but there is little by way of critical analysis. Joshua Sofaer's *The Many Headed Monster* (2009) boxed set lecture addresses the way in which audiences physically interact with live art, and includes several seminal participatory works. However, his

³⁰ Noteworthy books that are newly or soon to be released include Adam Alston's *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation* (2016b); Helen Nicholson H and Anna Harpin's (eds.) *Performance and Participation: Practices, Audiences, Politics* (2016); and James Frieze's (ed.) *Reframing Immersive Theatre: The Politics and Pragmatics of Participatory Performance* (March 2017).

exploration is limited by the one-hour duration; hence, there is not the space to engage with any specific theories or discourses in relation to the practice. There are, however, two Study Room Guides on participation housed at LADA: ‘One to one Performance’ (2009) by Rachel Zerihan and ‘Making it Your Own? - Social Engagement and Participation’ (2009) by FrenchMottershead.³¹ These personal collections offer reflections on selected performances and a list of related materials available in the Study Room and beyond. The Guides are a very useful starting point for research into participatory practices in live art.

It should also be acknowledged that “live art” is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of disciplines; thus, discourse on the field might just as easily be located in contemporary theatre, performance studies, and the visual arts more widely. Indeed, when one takes an across the arts approach to researching participation a much more expansive and contentious theoretical landscape is revealed. In addition, it becomes possible to see how notable publications on participation illustrate the ways in which conversations and agendas have progressed, notably from aesthetics and politics to commercialism and exploitation.

Susan Bennett’s book *Theatre Audiences: A theory of production and reception* (1997) is ‘a testimony to the contemporary emancipation of the spectator’ (Bennett 1997: 213). She notes that in experimental performance ‘Boundaries between the subjects, the creators, and the receivers are no longer distinct and such a move signals a

³¹ FrenchMottershead are a UK-based company founded by artists Rebecca French and Andrew Mottershead in 1999. They have been at the forefront of participatory live art, creating what they term as “micro-performances”, which can be understood as small actions, conversations, tasks, performed anonymously on an active audience or by an active audience. See Emma Cocker (2010); see also Jennie Klein (2006).

democratizing of the arts' (Bennett 1997: 10). Bennett's analysis of spectator engagement draws on Daphna Ben Chaim's study 'Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response' (1984), which proposes that 'the deliberate manipulation of distance is, to a great extent, the underlying factor that determines theatrical style in this century' (Ben Chaim in Bennett 1997: 16). This meets with Rancière's identification of two oppositional approaches to distance, 'epitomized by Brecht's epic theater and Artaud's theater of cruelty. On the one hand the spectator must become more distant, on the other he must lose any distance' (Rancière 2007: 272). This thesis will demonstrate how the question of distance and its effect on audience reception has foregrounded many of the debates surrounding participation.

Curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud's influential book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998, 2002) similarly recognises a reconsideration of distance as a critical development in the production and reception of contemporary art. Like Bennett he identifies democratic concern as the motivation for a generation of fine artists in the 1990s to involve the public more directly in their art (Bourriaud 2002: 56-57). Bourriaud broadly defines this work as relational art: 'A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space' (Ibid., 113). He employs Walter Benjamin's (1935) writing on the phenomenon of the disappearance of the aura of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction to emphasise the significance of relational aesthetics:

The public is being taken into account more and more. As if, henceforth, this "sole appearance of a distance" represented by the artistic aura were provided by it: as if the micro-community gathering in front of the image was becoming the actual source of the aura, the "distance" appearing specifically to create a halo around the work, which delegates its powers to it. (Ibid., 60-61)

For Bourriaud, there is no intrinsic value in the art exhibited; rather the value lies in the set of relations that it generates. While he does not acknowledge performance as a relevant form of relational art, the arguments that he presents, as I will discuss shortly, have fuelled numerous debates by theorists and commentators on participation across the contemporary visual arts (Ibid., 47-48). Therefore, his theoretical ideas and the critical responses to them have directly and indirectly impacted upon this investigation.

Although limitations of space prevent a complete analysis of Bourriaud's theory, there are several explanations worth noting. As Reason considers, these include that 'the intersubjective encounters prompted by relational art are shared and public' and the idea that 'they produce potentially politically radical spaces of exchange, but that these are provisional and temporary "micro-topias"' (2015: 273). Indeed, this thesis reveals many connections to these elaborations. I would wish to add that it is in *Relational Aesthetics* that we see the foundations for the analysis of participation as a phenomenological experience. Here Bourriaud cites Emmanuel Levinas in his theorising of relational art as a form with a face: the face being emblematic of the responsibility that we have towards others (2002: 21, 24). This line of inquiry also underscores discourse on participation in relation to presence and ethics as a form of mutual determination, discussed in chapters four and five. Bourriaud also forewarns against the consequences of a proliferation of participatory practices. He cautions, with reference to Guy Debord's (1967) Situationist critique, that, '[t]he "society of the spectacle" is thus followed by the society of extras, where everyone finds the illusion of an interactive democracy in more or less truncated channels of communication' (Ibid., 25-26). Indeed, the significance of Debord's critique is recognised by both Bishop and Rancière.

Since its publication, *Relational Aesthetics* has been the focus of much debate, not least because Bourriaud's definition of relational art centres on artworks that he has been directly involved with curating and promoting. Reason identifies that, 'an almost romantic exposition of the democratic and emancipatory potential of relational art practices' invites scrutiny, 'not least that there must necessarily be various degrees of intersubjective participation not all of which are equally emancipatory' (2015: 274). This argument underscores my examination of emancipating spectators in live art, and the way in which participation can in fact create a new hierarchy of spectatorship.

The most fervent in her criticism of Bourriaud's theory is critic Claire Bishop. David Beech suggests that Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics" and Bishop's "art of antagonism" represent the two leading, albeit contentious, theories of contemporary art's new social ontology towards an art of encounter (2010: 24). In Bishop's essay 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' (2004), she questions the types of associations being produced in relational art and what democracy means within this context (2004: 65). She goes on to argue that the interactions produced by relational aesthetics are not inherently democratic because they yield an ideal of community with an innate sense of togetherness. While these works may include debate and engagement, they adopt a feel-good position, referred to by Bourriaud as a "micro-topia". Therefore, the context of the gallery and the community of like-minded art lovers negate the possibility of friction or meaningful interrogation of the art (2004: 67). In contrast, Bishop argues for a more disruptive and antagonistic form of participation that sustains tensions between spectators and context; hence, being essentially more political and democratic (2004:

69-79). As such, it would offer a model of practice that acknowledges the divided subjectivity of the community of spectators. As Bishop puts it:

This relational antagonism would be predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony. It would thereby provide a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one another. (2004: 79)

Bishop's notion of antagonism and the related arguments is developed in her 2006 article in *ArtForum* entitled 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', and in her anthologies *Participation* (2006) and *Artificial Hells* (2012). The key debates and criticisms surrounding participation that arise in Bishop's theorising, inform many of the arguments that permeate this study.

Participation (2006) is an important book, as one of the first studies dedicated to participatory practices within the contemporary visual arts. It is here that Bishop continues to unravel the social dimension to participation, by mapping a historical lineage and theoretical framework for this practice. In doing so, she rebuffs the presupposition that participation is automatically a more active, political and emancipatory form of spectatorship. The claims made on behalf of participation are an enduring concern throughout my investigation. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012) shifts the focus to theatre and performance 'since participatory engagement tends to be expressed most forcefully in the live encounter between embodied actors in particular contexts' (Bishop, 2012: 3). Indeed, Bishop proposes a rethinking of the histories and principles of twentieth-century art through the lens of theatre, which supports its application in the theoretical framework outlined in this thesis (Ibid). The discussions offered in Bishop's latest critique on participatory art have much to offer the key themes to emerge in this study, most notably the tension

between aesthetics, ethics and politics. However, other than a couple of references to Abramović, the case study artists are not discussed within this compendium of participatory performance practices.

Following Bishop's opening out of discussions on the political and aesthetic motivations of social practices, there have been a number of other scholars that have moved into this area of interest. *Searching for Art's New Publics* (2010), edited by Jeni Walwin, examines the distinctions between the artist and spectator, and how the artwork and its public are being challenged. Like Bishop, Walwin focuses on social works, but the publics that she refers to are mostly from non-art communities. This is in contrast to the typically specialist audiences which attend the performances featured in this thesis. Nonetheless, David Beech's keynote essay 'Don't Look Now! Art after the Viewer and beyond Participation' informs the way in which I define the audience's involvement in the performances as "participation", by helpfully unpicking the related terminology. He also draws further attention to the claims made on behalf of participation and the limits of this mode of engagement.

Emerging from Performance Studies, Shannon Jackson is a leading figure in the analysis of the participatory impulse. Her monograph, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (2011) seeks to explore some of the contradictions, risks and resistances to contemporary experimental art-making. In her critique of a range of socially engaged art and performance practices she concurs with Bishop's notion of "antagonism" and "social dissensus", as well as advocating "social coordination", to constitute art forms that are capable of imagining alternative social systems (Jackson, 2011: 14).

Another major contribution to literature on socially engaged art and participatory practices is Jen Harvie's *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013). In common with Bishop and Jackson, *Fair Play* seeks to evaluate the social and political implications of participatory works. However, in response to Bishop's call for participatory art to be contextualised, Harvie frames her discussion with the social and material circumstances of the UK, which sets it apart from Jackson's US-based *Social Works*. By her own admission, Harvie is sceptical about the claims made on behalf of participation. Moreover, she questions whether this trend is in fact complicit with a neoliberal capitalist culture. To this end, Harvie suggests that these works might 'offer a spectacle of communication and social engagement rather more than a qualitatively and sustainably rich and even critical engagement' (2013: 3). This argument underpins an on-going concern in my analysis of the case study performances.

Adam Alston concedes that he owes much to Harvie's arguments surrounding participation, especially in relation to neoliberalism. A number of noteworthy articles (2012-2016) and his recently published monograph *Beyond Immersive Theatre Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation* (2016b) have quickly established him as an authoritative voice on participation. Indeed, Alston's suggestion that an individual's motivation to participate is frequently fuelled by narcissistic and hedonistic desire struck a chord with my own impulse to volunteer. This thesis will make use of several concepts emerging from his theorising, specifically "entrepreneurial participation" (2013), the "errant spectator" (2016a), and "productive participation" (2016b). However, Alston's writing is largely focused on the politics of immersive

theatre aesthetics. It does not talk about live art practices or give much thought to the experience *itself* from a phenomenological perspective.

This differs from Josephine Machon's earlier exploration of *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (2013), which covers a range of forms that includes live art, as well as engaging with theories regarding the ways in which an embodied experience is constituted. In a detailed survey of the history, theory and practice of immersive theatre, Machon offers a lengthy analysis towards a definition of this complex and imprecise form. In recent years, there has been a trend to brand any participatory performance as an immersive experience, but Machon's classification suggests that there are specific attributes that distinguish immersion. One of the characteristics of immersive theatre lacking in the case study works is an 'in-its-own-worldness' quality (Machon 2013: 93). However, they do share a number of central features, in particular 'the emphasis on audience involvement' and 'a prioritisation of the sensual world', which enable my analysis of these works to thoughtfully interact with Machon's writing (Ibid., 70). In addition, I also make use of Machon's first book on *(Syn)aesthetics* (2009). This study underpins discussions on the form of participation and how the participant's sensate involvement is manifested as presence or "prae-sens" (Scarry, 1985: 9, 197 in Machon 2009: 25). I have identified presence as an area that is currently lacking substantial critique. To this end, my thesis will expand on Machon's insight to offer multiple readings of presence within the situation of participation.

Gareth White's book *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the invitation* (2013) complements Machon's research, by filling a particular gap on the processes and principles that support the invitation to participate. However, the study does not look at

live art; choosing instead to focus on audience participation within applied, social and popular theatre forms. The primary concern of White's book is to unpack the moment when a spectator accepts the invitation, and to explore the notion of audience participation as aesthetic material. Similar to my study, he draws on the writings of Erika Fischer-Lichte and Rancière in his analysis of emancipating spectators. White also identifies a number of foundational concepts which touch on my research, specifically concerning ritual, risk, and phenomenology. Returning to an emancipated spectator as outlined by Rancière, he concludes that: 'a participant can be a spectator to their own actions in a variety of ways ... It is in the sheer variety of experiential relationships to participatory action that we find a kind of autonomy' (2013: 206). The tension between heteronomy and autonomy informs many arguments within the book. However, White's theory ultimately resides in 'the continuity of the participant's social being', and how this can be temporarily enhanced, re-shaped, and exposed by the practices of audience participation (Ibid). There are clear overlaps between the hypothesis applied in *Audience Participation* and the arguments within this thesis. Consequently, I employ his ideas at various points, to define and flesh out critical concepts. Still, at the same time, my investigation extends beyond the invitation and the practices explored by White, to offer an alternative theoretical framework for understanding the limits and possibilities of participatory performance.

In addition to the works listed above, there have been several notable journal publications on participation. In particular, I wish to highlight 'On Philosophy & Participation' in *Performance Research*, volume 16, issue 4, December 2011, co-edited by Laura Cull and Karoline Gritzner; and a themed section on 'Theatre Audiences' in *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, volume 12, issue 1, May

2015, co-edited by Matthew Reason and Kirsty Sedgman. The articles that feature in these two important collections offer a number of insights that enlighten the discussions that develop in this thesis, as well as demonstrating a range of research approaches to the study of participation.

The literature survey that I have presented in this thesis evidences a general lack of research dedicated to live art and its audience. In contrast, there is an abundance of writing on immersive and participatory performance practices, which includes some live art but not the performances under discussion in this study. I propose that we are now at a juncture where there is a need to drill down into the research, to offer a more detailed analysis of the foundational elements that underpin participatory experience. Furthermore, the arguments that surround this work are largely directed at the aesthetics and politics of the work, rather than their transformative and embodied capacity. The theoretical framework to be developed in this thesis will afford special attention to the ways in which participatory experience converges with ritual processes; enacts varying mutations of bodily presence; and generates a reconsideration of the ethics of spectatorship in contemporary performance practice. The discussion will also establish that we are reaching the point where spectator-participation might be considered as a practice in its own right.

1.8 Map of Thesis and Chapter Overview

In addressing the principle aim of this thesis to develop a theoretical framework for analysing participation within live art, this thesis brings together multiple perspectives and critical concepts. Therefore, each of the chapters has its own discursive focus, while at points engaging with the broader dialogues that permeate this research.

Chapter two: ‘The Birth of the Participant-Spectator’ begins with a first-person account of my experience of La Pocha Nostra’s *Mapa/Corpo 2* (2006), this time from the viewpoint of a watching-spectator. In the first half of the chapter, I examine the type of participation that occupies this study, unravelling a succession of related terms and establishing the way that participation exists on a continuum of interactivity. I look at the form and formlessness of participation, and the ways in which it can be understood as a highly visceral and feminised mode of practice, with reference to the writings of Gritzner (2011) and Machon (2009). The chapter acknowledges how the incomplete and at times unpredictable form of participation is seen as problematic by both commentators and makers of participation. However, I caution against a defined “dramaturgy of participation” as proposed by ZU-UK’s Persis Jade Maravala and Jorge Lopes Ramos (2016), which I suggest may be reductive and elitist. Still, at the same time, I recommend that we do accept spectator-participation as a field of practice in its own right, with its own set of practices, needs and issues.

In the second half of the chapter I introduce a number of prominent theories and debates that surround participation as a democratic process. The discussion owes much to Bishop’s work in its uncovering of the main impulses that prompted the shift towards co-production in the contemporary arts. I open out the notion of “the emancipated spectator”, which Rancière argues has been interpreted as synonymous with a participatory spectator. I draw on Julie Wilkinson’s 2015 essay ‘Dissatisfied ghosts: Theatre spectatorship and the production of cultural value’ to validate his suggestion that an audience member may in fact be more emancipated from a distant position, whereupon they are free to interpret the unfolding performance in relation to their own

personal narratives. At the same time, as Wilkinson establishes, the spectator is ‘never an isolated subject’ (Wilkinson 2015: 142). The chapter contemplates Rancière’s analysis of the way that binary relations have underscored the desire for audience participation. Indeed, binaries and borderlines emerge as fundamental concerns for participatory practice, and are further explored in the subsequent theories on the transformative and embodied capacity of participation. There theoretical perspectives can be summarised as Fischer-Lichte’s (2008) envisaging of the “transformative power” of participation; Tony Fisher’s (2011) framing of participation as “radical democratic theatre”; and Laura Cull’s (2011) notion of “ontological participation” founded as an immanent encounter. The philosophies and critiques that arise during chapter two provide the basis for a theoretical framework through which to analyse participation in the case study works.

Chapter three: ‘Border Crossing and “Interactive Rituals”’ is the most extensive section in the thesis, as it brings together the reflections and analysis of all three of my encounters with La Pocha Nostra’s practice. The chapter applies and extends the theoretical framework that was established in the previous chapter by looking at the actual act of participation and the way that it is fostered. The discussion starts in the way that all of my chapters begin, with an anecdote. This time I recount my experience as an artist collaborator with the company, performing in an untitled performance installation at MOCA, Tucson, Arizona (2007). After drawing attention to the way in which a participant-spectator appears to be indeterminately between the two sides of the performance border, I establish what I am calling “the paradox of participation”. This opens up a discussion on the audienceness of a live art spectator, which supports my moving beyond Rancière’s reading of an emancipated spectator in a theatre context.

This is followed by a closer look at how our “dual citizenship” inside and outside of the work coincides with Gómez-Peña’s own border activism. Importantly, it is here that I emphasise the interdependency of binary and paradoxical relations in the situation of participation, therefore, allowing us to perceive contradiction without taking a side (Bateson 2016: 170). I adopt Nora Bateson’s term “symmathesy” as a new concept to describe the system of interdependency and mutual learning that occurs during participation, and which reflects the complex interactions that take place within these live works. (2016: 168).

In the next part of the chapter I take a look at what drives participatory desire and the potential resistances to this work, referencing the research of Alston (2013) and Gritzner (2011). I will establish how the separation of those that do from those that don’t participate can create a hierarchy of spectatorship. I will also highlight another tier in the social structure of participation, which has arisen from the emergence of expert participant-spectators. I examine how La Pocha Nostra’s practice corresponds to the three main impulses identified by Bishop (2006): activation, authorship, and community. The focus of the chapter then shifts to an analysis of the performance methodologies and processes that work towards emancipating spectators within La Pocha Nostra’s performances. It looks at the way in which the company frame their productions as “interactive rituals” and “extreme performance games”, and how these concepts might be used as a lens through which to examine their work. To this end, the chapter identifies several commonalities between ritual processes and the strategies and tactics uses by La Pocha Nostra to cultivate participation. The chapter builds towards an assessment of the aftermath of participation, in relation to intimacy and the transformative potential of these experiences. It is here where I draw an analogy

between participatory performance and a one-night stand sexual encounter, and reflect on Gomme's reading of Emmanuel Levinas in her search for intimacy (2015) and Lisa Register and Tracy Henley's 'The Phenomenology of Intimacy' (1992).

Chapter four: 'The Spectator is Present', starts with an account of my experience as a spectator at Abramović's *512 Hours* (2014). My analysis begins with the lengthy queue outside of the gallery and the taking of a "selfie", prompting a discussion on the value of *being there* in the context of Joseph Pine and James Gilmore's (1999) "the experience economy", drawing on studies by Harvie (2013), Alston (2013), and Noah Horowitz (2011) concerning the commodification of art as experience. On entering the performance, I turn to Breel's analysis (2015) in my interpretation of the way that both agency and the display of agency are manifested in *512 Hours*, and how this meets with the notion of emancipating spectators.

Building on from this discussion, the chapter takes up its primary focus of analysing the varying representations of presence that are fostered during participation. This responds to the lack of sufficient research on this subject that I noted during my literature review. I start off by looking at the way that the implied risk and failure inherent in participation produces a heightened self-awareness in participants' expectant bodies that founds an intense form of energy, drawing on Alston's (2013) writing. Next in the chapter I determine how the artist "having presence" enables them to channel the energy between bodies and influence participation. To this end, I engage with Cormac Power's (2008) research on "auratic presence", Jane Goodall's (2008) analysis of "stage presence", and Fischer-Lichte's (2012) "strong concept of presence". In the following part of the chapter I analyse how participation can constitute an embodied experience of

presence, applying Fischer-Lichte's "radical concept of presence", Machon's notions of "(syn)aesthetics" and "prae-sens", and Hélène Cixous's "écriture féminine" and conception that the "eyes are lips" (Cixous 2001: 9). All of these perspectives also converge with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theorising on phenomenology. From a different viewpoint, I consider Laura Cull's (2011) theory of "ontological participation" and how presence is embodied through attention in action or looking in the midst of doing. Lastly, the chapter will explore the phenomenology of co-presence through the lens of participation, drawing on the concepts of Martin Heidegger (1971, 1978), Emmanuel Levinas (1969, 1987, 1989), and Simon Jones's (2012) adoption of their theories in relation to participation.

Chapter five: 'The Ethics of Participation in an "Ethically Imperfect World"' focuses on the ethics of participation in Gob Squad's *Western Society* (2015) and *War and Peace* (2016). Ethics was another area that I perceived as a gap in the research on participation. My first-person accounts of Gob Squad's performances underpin the developing discussions, which contemplate the ethics of the self and ethics as encounter, engaging mainly with the work of Nicholas Ridout (2009) and Erving Goffman (1959) amongst others. The first part of the chapter charts the way that participatory forms from the late 1990s onwards have cast theatre etiquette or ethics into a period of uncertainty, following Caroline Heim's 2016 study on the *Audience as Performer*. Still, at the same time, I contemplate Heddon and her co-authors' (2012) assertion that there is a strong impulse to 'give good audience', and the way that participation can invoke the notion of an 'ideal audience-participant'. I also return to participation's precarious relationship to commercialism and exploitation, considering

Bishop's (2008) arguments concerning "delegated performance" and participation as "a luxury game".

In the next part of the chapter I contemplate two theoretical positions that work to unravel how we interpret ethics in participation. The first emerges from Ridout's writing, specifically his conception of 'an imaginary "spectator" within us'. The second is Goffman's theory on "the presentation of self", in particular the "front" that is managed by the spectator. Following this examination, the discussion shifts to explore Ridout's notion that "ethics as encounter" underscores the mutuality experienced during participation. I also look at Goffman's theorising of "teams", establishing that their 'reciprocal dependence' and 'reciprocal familiarity' are influencing factors on the composition of ethics as encounter. Towards the end of the chapter, I look at what happens when ethics are transgressed and participation goes wrong, drawing on Alston's (2016) "errant-spectator", Ridout's (2012) "mis-spectator", and introducing my own category of the "dis-spectator". A key element in this chapter is the interview (2016) that I conducted with Gob Squad's Sharon Smith.

In Chapter Six: 'Final Conclusions' I offer an overview of my findings according to the main insights that I have gained over the course of my study. In doing so, I discuss the implications of my research on the field, while determining that there are still several fruitful areas for investigation.

In summary, this introduction to the thesis has set out the parameters of my study; tracing the origins of participation in live art and the way in which the field of immersive and participatory practices has developed. The map of the thesis indicates how I intend to develop a theoretical framework that extends understandings of

participation and addresses the gaps in research, most notably in relation to ritual and performance processes, presence and ethics. The chapter demonstrates how the thesis uses my own experiences alongside critical concepts and debates, to analyse participatory live art from crossing the border to the potential consequences of the encounter.

Chapter Two: The Birth of the Participant-Spectator

2.1 The Second Encounter: La Pocha Nostra's *Mapa/Corpo 2 'Community Rituals for the New Millennium'*

It is June 2006. La Pocha Nostra are closing the PSi #12: Performing Rights conference³² with their performance *Mapa/Corpo 2 'Community Rituals for the New Millennium'*. From a lectern, Gómez-Peña blesses his space with “sacred spray” and drinks from a detergent bottle labelled “Mr Clean” which he spits out at the audience. Addressing spectators he poignantly asks:

Where is the border between you and me?
Between my words and your mind?
Between my mouth and your fears?
Where exactly is this performance taking place?
(Gómez-Peña, 2005: 204)

The speech is followed by a series of interactive acts. The first is an invitation for spectators to decolonise the naked body of a female performer “of color”, by removing acupuncture needles that each display a miniature US flag, see Figure 2. I cautiously stand in line, but the responsibility of carefully removing a needle weighs heavy.



Figure 2: An interactive ritual to decolonise a body “of color”. Photo: Julio Pantoja.³³

³² The twelfth Performance Studies international conference was held at Queen Mary, University of London, 8-11 June 2006. It explored the relationship between contemporary performance practices and human rights, asking: ‘What can performance do for human rights, and human rights for performance?’

³³ The source for the image is (<http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/enc07-performances/item/957-enc07-la-pocha-nostra?tmpl=component&print=1>)

The second interactive act offers Roberto Sifuentes³⁴ as the centrepiece for a human altar. He is raised on a platform, ritualistically bathed in blood, and adorned with flowers, animal organs and incense. Disabled by a leg brace and bandaged groin, he is at the mercy of the spectators, who have been urged by Gómez-Peña to write a response to the future of civilisation on his body; a formidable task, see Figure 3.



Figure 3: An interactive ritual with Roberto Sifuentes as a human altar. Photo: Julio Pantoja.³⁵

As participants increasingly revel in manipulating the body and props at their disposal, I am reminded of Abramović's *Rhythm 0* (1974) and I wonder how far this audience will go. My thoughts are broken when an impassioned Gómez-Peña makes his plea: "Is there anyone who is willing to co-create with me?" Participants come forward and the human mural begins again, but this time I remain as a watching-spectator.

As a series of "tableaux vivants"³⁶ unfold, a white middle-aged male enters the performance zone; he strips off, leaving only his glasses on. Next a black thirty-something woman crosses the border; she pulls down her skirt to reveal her bottom. To

³⁴ Roberto Sifuentes is a founding member of La Pocha Nostra.

³⁵ The source for the image is the same as Figure 2, see footnote 33.

³⁶ The term "tableaux vivants" translated from French means "living pictures". The practice was at its most popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Its usage as a form of protest in the early twentieth century paved the way for its appropriation as a method of political activism within La Pocha Nostra's work.

the shifting bodies of strangers, Gómez-Peña asks time and time again for that illusive “final image”. Eventually the image is found, but only to be lost a few minutes later, and the transient community disperses as quickly as it united. Participants get dressed, discuss their experience with friends, and in a somewhat euphoric and slightly displaced state they make the journey home.

While my position as a watching-spectator afforded me greater freedom of interpretation as I attempted to translate the images; the experience was not as compelling as my first felt encounter. Nevertheless, this is not to say that watching-spectators are passive in La Pocha Nostra’s practice. On the contrary, their looking is recognised as a form of participation, as they are encouraged to act as co-directors and auditors of the emerging tableaux vivants through their suggestions and affirmation. During these occasions, the watching-directing-spectator, observed by Gómez-Peña and the remaining onlookers, momentarily becomes a performing-spectator. However, even though observing the human mural challenged my interpretive skills, I must concede that I may have engaged further with the performance if I had been more communicative. If there is a main principle for spectatorship in La Pocha Nostra’s interactive rituals, and arguably any form of participatory practice, it is this: the more that is given in participation, the more that is taken in participation, for both the artist and the spectator.

2.2 Introduction

In chapter two I continue to lay the foundations for a theoretical framework through which to analyse participatory live art. The chapter serves to uncover the nature, purpose and potential impact of participation on contemporary performance practices.

Echoing the politically activist agenda that underpins La Pocha Nostra's interactive rituals, a principle concern throughout the chapter is the rhetoric of participation as a democratising of the art-making process. To this end, my analysis engages with several important and complex debates that elucidate the potentialities and limitations of participation for the spectator, and the effect that it has on the relationship between aesthetics, politics and social relations. The research draws on a range of critical concepts arising in the work of authors including Claire Bishop, Jacques Rancière, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Gareth White, Josephine Machon, and Laura Cull.

The first part of the chapter deals with the nature of participation by unravelling definitions, levels of interactivity, and form. This works to determine the kind of participation under discussion in the thesis, and the potential issues and debates that it provokes. The examination commences by examining the different terms for audience involvement in performance. Resulting from this, I establish that the mode of spectatorship cultivated in the case study works is a special form of "participation", which is distinct and 'goes beyond' the more typical definition of the term (White 2013: 4). In the next section, I analyse the level of participation in operation, applying the model provided by Ronald J. Pelias and James VanOosting (1987) to propose that interactivity exists on a continuum. This leads to a discussion on the form and formlessness of participation, which highlights how participation can be seen to display characteristics indicative of a feminised style of practice. It is at this juncture that I challenge Persis Jade Maravala and Jorge Lopes Ramos' (2016) proposal that we need to establish a "dramaturgy of participation"; while suggesting that we do need to acknowledge that spectator-participation is a practice in its own right.

The second part of the chapter focuses on theories concerning the established relationship between participation and political empowerment. It starts off with Claire Bishop's (2006) theorising on the artistic impulses and political claims made on behalf of participation towards a democratising of the arts. This is followed by an examination of a number of pertinent theories on participation, including "the emancipated spectator" as outlined in Jacques Rancière's writing, and discourse concerning the way that participation may challenge binary relations and borders within contemporary performance. I consider the arguments put forward by Rancière and other commentators to dismantle the presupposition that a participant-spectator is an emancipated spectator, establishing that there can be more than one way of setting the audience free. To this end, I draw attention to the embodied and transformative capacity of participation, emphasised in the writings of Erika Fischer-Lichte, Tony Fisher, and Laura Cull. All of these theories, albeit founded on different philosophical viewpoints, are a testament to the way in which participation can challenge borders and binary relations, most notably between the artist and the spectator. Therefore, although this chapter evidences that there are limitations to participation as a democratic and emancipatory act, it also demonstrates how crossing borders can open up our consciousness to alternative political and social realities, even if only for the duration of the performance.

2.3 Towards a Definition

In the next three sections of the chapter, the discussion focuses on the nature of participation within participatory live art, engaging with ideas from a range of performance studies and contemporary visual arts scholars. I will begin by looking at the thorny terms that are used to describe the direct engagement of the audience in the development of a performance. However, as Gareth White (2013) recognises, all

audience members are participatory, from the physical act of purchasing their ticket and taking their seat in the auditorium; to their spontaneous reactions throughout the performance and their commitment to see the piece through to the end, or to slip out at an opportune moment (White, 2013: 3-4). From an earlier generation, Susan Bennett (1997) similarly maintained that the audience has always been ultimately in control of a performance with the power to attend or not; therefore, the responsibility awarded to spectators during audience participation is merely a development of this role (1997: 18). Nevertheless, as we saw in my tracing of participatory practices, experimental performance has blurred the boundaries between the makers and the receivers of performance, signalling a democratising of the arts and bringing about a significant change in performance and related theory (Ibid., 10).

Since the proliferation of participatory practices there have been a number of definitions used to classify the various forms of audience engagement in performance. David Beech (2010) summarises these concepts as: participation, collaboration, interaction and co-operation; which he suggests should be examined as a structured set of relations that are best understood in terms of each other. Accordingly he asserts that:

Interactivity has two means, which tend to be conflated in discussions of interactivity in art: (1) acting with each other and (2) (especially in computer science) responding to the user. Participation means having a share, taking part or being part of a whole. Collaboration (broken down as co-labouring), means working together, as does co-operation. (Beech in Walwin 2010: 24)

Despite clear distinctions between these related terms, Beech observes that discourse tends to be reduced to a single focus: how much an audience is active within the work and at what point in the process that activation occurs (Ibid). He notes that Bishop (2006) helpfully establishes a clear difference between participation and interactivity (Beech 2010: 25). For Bishop, interactivity, especially in the context of digital

technology, can be understood as merely involving the activation of an individual spectator, whereas participation also has a social function (2006: 10). Indeed, it is this emphasis on the social experience that Beech argues is one of the key arguments to give participatory work its prominence within the contemporary arts (Beech 2010: 25).

White broadly defines audience participation as simply ‘the participation of an audience, or an audience member, in the action of a performance’ (White 2013: 4). Yet, he also draws attention to a special kind of participation that is ‘exceptional’, and that ‘goes beyond’ what we imagine that we should feel and do as a spectator, and this experiential difference is not only perceived by the doer, but also by those that witness the participation (Ibid). He is careful to mark this form of participation as different from the typical interactions and permitted behaviour that we have come to expect in a performance situation. According to White, ‘the action of performance’ has at least two dimensions: ‘everyday social action’ and action within the ‘extra-everyday space of the performance’; which he suggests become blurred when audience participation is present, as participants shift between and at times coexist within both realms (2013: 5). It can be said, therefore, that participation produces a complex form of “relational aesthetics”, to borrow Nicholas Bourriaud’s term. Furthermore, as White suggests, participation might be seen to function as aesthetic material, particularly in the way that the spectator becomes the artist’s medium (2013: 9-10).

In the introductory chapter, I highlighted a recent fashion to brand all participatory work as “immersive”. An example of this is the way that Myf Warhurst’s review for Marina Abramović’s *512 Hours* (2014) in *The Guardian* refers to the piece as immersive art. As I noted earlier, for the most part the case studies in this thesis do not

fully denote the characteristics of immersive practice distinguished by Josephine Machon, particularly in relation to an ‘in-its-own-worldness’ element (Machon 2013: 93). This is largely because they do not seek to engross the audience within the fictional space of a narrative. In the instance of *512 Hours*, discussed fully in chapter four, I suggest that the gallery space frames the participation as an experiment in art rather than the creation of an immersive experience. But, that is not to deny that there were elements of an ‘in-its-own-worldness’ belonging to the ethos of the white cube gallery, outlined in chapter three, such as the way that the performance operated outside of everyday time (no watches allowed) and with its own set of rules. In addition, for those able to achieve a state of mindfulness, an ability to become “imaginatively immersed”³⁷ was possible.

Like *512 Hours*, La Pocha Nostra’s *Ex Centris* (2003) and *Mapa Corpo 2* (2007) were visibly framed by an exhibition/performance space, negating the possibility of forgetting that it was a work of art. Nevertheless, the “total” environment created during these performance installations produces a “heightened state” in the spectator (Gómez-Peña 2005: 81), which is akin to a type of immersion. The untitled performance at the MOCA, Tucson, reflected on in chapter three, had a greater capacity to immerse spectators because it was realised in a disused warehouse that enabled the audience to more easily re-imagine the location.

Gob Squad’s productions, analysed in chapter five, contain more narrative than found in the performances by Abramović or La Pocha Nostra. However, rather than

³⁷ Tassos Stevens, co-director of London-based immersive theatre company Coney, in his keynote lecture at the Audience, Experience, Desire Conference at Exeter University, 30 January 2016, discussed the idea of being imaginatively immersed as an alternative to being physically immersed.

engrossing the audience in a plot, they draw attention to the theatrical frame within which participation is performed. Nonetheless, for the ‘remote actors’ who are given a role to carry out during *Western Society*, there is an element of being immersed in the instructions communicated.

Overall, although I propose that forms of audience participation in the works under analysis are not wholly immersive, the way that they encourage the spectator to experience the inside of the performance, by taking part in the action, echoes immersive theatre and makes it a useful reference point (White 2013: 16-17). Throughout the thesis, I will primarily adopt the term “participation”, rather than “immersive”, to describe the audience’s involvement in the case study works. This intersects with my research interests in the aesthetic conditions and social dimension of the work, emphasised in Bishop’s defining of participation, as well as White’s demarcating of an extraordinary form of “participation” that ‘goes beyond’ our typical experience as spectators. However, I also acknowledge Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s term “interactive rituals” as a potential defining term, in the way that it makes explicit the commonalities that these participatory experiments share with ritual.

2.4 Levels of Participation

Along with the varying definitions to classify participation, there are also different levels of activity. The ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’ (1969) offered by Sherry Arnstein is one of the more commonly applied spectrums. This eight rung ladder outlines varying levels of participation ranging from ‘manipulation’ to ‘full participation’. However, the scheme has been criticised by Bishop (2012) for

advocating a hierarchy of assessment, according to which the value of a performance can be determined by its place on the ladder of participation.

An alternative and less contentious system is the continuum of participation outlined by Ronald J. Pelias and James VanOosting in 'A Paradigm for Performance Studies', published in 1987. This scale spans from the inactive to the proactive, but it doesn't imply an evaluative hierarchy to the same extent as Arnstein.³⁸ In this thesis, the performances to be examined mostly demonstrate the third level of participation: interactive. At this stage on the spectrum, both performer and spectator can be seen to function as co-producers of the experience. Consequently, it is more difficult to distinguish between the two roles. However, it should be noted that although 'performers maintain the authority to initiate interaction and to select particular subjects, the audience is invited to create within an established framework' (Pelias and VanOosting 1987: 224-225). This converges with my analysis of spectators within the case study works, who are invited to participate in the performances within a delineated structure. The thesis establishes a tension between inviting the audience to directly engage in the performance, and putting measures in place to ensure that the participation is effectively managed. Furthermore, in chapter four, I stress the perceived possibility of failure as a driving force in channeling the hedonistic desire for participation, versus the actual possibility of failure given the parameters set out by the artist.

According to Pelias and VanOosting there is also a fourth stage on the continuum of participation: proactive, which corresponds to Arnstein's notion of 'full participation', and Astrid Breel's proactive level of agency (Breel 2015: 375, 381) discussed in chapter

³⁸ See Pelias and VanOosting (1987: 224-225) for the full continuum of participation.

four. At this level, '[t]he question of who is the performer and who is the audience is moot; any distinction between performance event and "real life" would be meaningless, without referent' (Pelias and VanOosting 1987: 224-225). I suggest that the sanctions imposed on the agency given to the audience in the pieces to be discussed, denies the possibility of proactive participation.

Yet, as Matthew Reason contends 'we should not – at least supposedly – evaluate performances as good or not-so-good according to their position on a ladder of participation, but because of their aesthetic and experiential qualities', while he acknowledges that '[i]n practice, however, this is exactly what is implied by discourses that valorise active spectatorship for its own sake over optical passivity' (2015: 279). Indeed, it can be argued that although a participant may be physically activated through participation, they may find themselves obediently carrying out the instructions or preconceived plans of the artist. For this reason, as Anthony Howell tells us, '[t]he danger is that while a certain liveliness has been conferred to the artwork, the spectator has been reduced to an automaton' (2000: 64). Therefore, the participant-spectator might also be seen as a passive recipient. Similarly, Jen Harvie (2013) argues that participation can foster a compliant mode of spectatorship, with performing-spectators 'dutifully performing as instructed, when instructed' (2013: 43). However, Howell goes on to say that 'interaction need not be banal' and in fact can begin to dissolve or question the conventions of performance, such as the performer/spectator relationship and seating arrangement (2000: 64-66). This argument underscores my examination of the way that participation unsettles binary relations and borders in performance, discussed in the second part of this chapter.

What will become clear as the thesis progresses is that the redefinition of the spectator as participatory has created a whole set of issues regarding the concept of performance:

First, questions of power arise when deciding who (performer and/or audience) may be given (or denied) the right to initiate an aesthetic interaction ... Second, questions of accountability arise when assigning varying degrees of responsibility for artistic achievement to performers and audiences ... Third, questions of evaluation derive from the differences between communal and expert standards. What may be sanctioned within the special world of artists by their own elite authority may not find general support within a given community. (Pelias and VanOosting 1987: 225)

These concerns over power, accountability and value continue to permeate critiques about participatory practice, and while the audience for this kind of interactive experience appears to be growing, so too do the suspicions of scholars and critics.

2.5 The Form of Participation

Expanding on the nature of participation, this next section will explore the contentious discussions that surround its composition. I suggest that to a great extent the debates concerning participatory practices are really a question of form. As Karoline Gritzner questions in her article entitled 'Form and Formlessness: Participation at the limit' (2011): what happens to form when aesthetic autonomy is challenged through relational or participatory art? Gritzner observes that discussions on form are pivotal to Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics, and shift the focus beyond the social dimension of participation towards its aesthetic value (2011: 111). The practices depicted by Bourriaud offer inter-subjective encounters within an emergent structure, rather than objects that can be consistently reproduced by the artist. In this way these relational works challenge the commodification of art as something that accrues value

and is sold on. However, as I discuss in chapter four, it can be argued that today's "experience economy" repackages participatory encounters with the consumer in mind.

Gritzner notes that relational form is 'formless' by maintaining that, '[i]f the participants fail or refuse to take part in an event which is essentially about their actions and reactions ...the event might not take place and its potential might remain unexplored, its form unrealized' (2011: 110). In other words participatory art practices only achieve their form through the act of participation. However, Howell cautions that by acknowledging the presence of the audience we might undo the artwork's capacity to 'hold itself together' (2000: 55-56). He argues that instead of art's 'self-structuring ability to maintain itself', it becomes reliant on the presence of the audience to find that structure. At his most bleak he states: 'By acknowledging the audience, performance can become a parasite' (Ibid., 56). This echoes Daphna Ben Chaim's (1984) earlier observation that '[w]hen distance disappears then art does too' (cited in Bennett 1997: 15). Yet, despite Howell's scepticism, he proceeds to outline how the 'homeostasis' of an artwork can be preserved through repetition and continuity of experience, which has the capacity to unite an audience even if they encountered the work on separate occasions (Howell 2000: 66). This unification of spectators through their participatory experiences extends the artwork beyond its given time and space. Nowhere is this more apparent than on social media platforms, which have become a focus for post-performance discussion. I will return to this point in chapter four when I examine the "I was there" allure of participatory performance.

Nevertheless, as shown by the levels of interactivity, Gritzner identifies that participation is not always unpredictable and can be wholly planned out, with

prescriptive instructions for the audience to follow (2011: 110). Therefore, it might manifest as the paradoxical form of the formless, or in opposition it might present a fairly fixed form. In all of the examples under analysis in this thesis, the audience's role is crucial to fulfilling the aesthetic potential of the work. While there might be elements that exist on their own terms, the spectator's participation gives material form to central elements of these performances. There is no human mural without the audience (La Pocha Nostra). There are no communal displays of mindfulness without the audience (Marina Abramović). There is no re-enactment of a family karaoke night from a scarcely watched YouTube video without the audience (Gob Squad). As White puts it: 'These processes make the audience member into material that is used to compose the performance: an artistic medium'; consequently, audience participation becomes aesthetic material (White, 2013: 9-10). The issues created by interactivity, noted by Pelias and VanOosting, reside in the question of how audience participation is brought forth: who has the power and the responsibility for the work, and how do we measure the value of this aesthetic material?

I propose that although the case study works are only partially formed, in a material sense, before the audience's participation, their resultant appearance has largely been predetermined by the artist responsible. Hence, while they may appear formless, they do in fact have form, which is given visibility by the audience. Still, in spite of the fairly fixed form within which participation occurs, the performances under discussion also retain a space for the spontaneous interactions and even transgressions of their spectators, evidenced in the case study chapters. Moreover, this thesis will go on to demonstrate that it is the emergent nature of form in participatory performance that converges with the evolving manifestations of presence that it brings forth, discussed in

chapter four. And, this in turn creates a mutable code of ethics for spectators to navigate, discussed in chapter five.

This innate fluidity of form also meets with Machon's writing on (syn)aesthetic modes of practice in relation to the inheritance of a feminised style on (syn)aesthetic modes of practice (Machon 2009: 26). Machon maintains that (syn)aesthetic performance is characterised as the 'consolidation of a variety of artistic principles, forms and techniques, manipulated in such a way so as to fuse the somatic and the semantic *in order to produce* a visceral response in the audience' (Machon 2009: 14; emphasis original). The way that it coincides with a feminised style is made most striking in Machon's appropriation of Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*³⁷ and Luce Irigaray's assertion that '*form is never complete in her*', as she determines a 'feminine morphology' of form which remains in a constant state of becoming (Irigaray, 1999 [1991]: 55; emphasis original, in Machon 2009: 43). However, I acknowledge that establishing a 'feminised' style risks reproducing essentialist notions of gender. I am also conscious of the way in which this emergent formation of the feminine can be perceived as a lack of form, or rather a lack of stability, converging with the image of the feminist writer as a 'madwoman'.³⁸ Moreover, I am wary of a developing dialogue on the importance of spectator comprehension and "getting it" in participation,³⁹ as what might be seen as an attempt to harden or masculinise this unruly form. While, my thesis recognises the potential dangers of participation, I suggest that these are an

³⁷ The term "*écriture féminine*" literally means "feminine writing", and was first coined by Hélène Cixous in her essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975).

³⁸ See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000/1980) for a detailed critique on the *Madwoman in the Attic*.

³⁹ These conversations were particularly prevalent during the conference on 'Audience, Experience, Desire: interactivity and participation in contemporary performance and the cultural industries' hosted by the University of Exeter in January 2016.

essential part of its makeup. If you control the form too much, you fix what is inherently fluid; thus, you replace participation as a meaningful act with the display or spectacle of participation. Nonetheless, in a culture of blogging, where everyone is a self-proclaimed art critic, and at a time when funding applications must emphasise the impact of the proposed work; relinquishing control of the art is a precarious business. There are other parallels to be found between écriture féminine and participation, in particular their shared resistance to fixed binary oppositions. Indeed, the thesis will draw on Hélène Cixous's writings in chapter four on presence, and in chapter five on ethics.

Maravala and Ramos of ZU-UK suggest that what is needed to create a more responsible form is "a dramaturgy of participation" (2016). These performance makers of ground-breaking immersive works such as the infamous overnight trilogy *Hotel Medea* (2006-2012), identify a problem in conventional performance training for actors, directors, and writers which does not take into account a live and participating audience, stating:

The supposed freedom offered to audience members, or the ability to interact directly with the fictional scenario in question, raises a number of issues. The skill and experience required by makers to design such logistics, and for performers to manage active audiences in the context of such a proposition, would benefit from more rigorous investigation and care. (Maravala and Ramos 2016)

For Maravala and Ramos this methodology towards immersive and participatory performance 'can, and must, be taught'. Furthermore, it should be steered by established practitioners of participatory work, to 'encourage excellent artistic practice'. It is this proposition that I take issue with because it implies a level of quality to be achieved, which is buttressed by the proposed requirement for a more formal training approach. While I recognise the importance of learning from the practice of experienced makers, I

also subscribe to Gómez-Peña's advice for emerging performance artists to: '[r]espect your elders and predecessors. Treat us with tenderness, and then, when the time comes, kill us ritualistically' (2005: 186).

It is, for me, the inherent risk and pursuit of innovation, characteristic of these practices, which continues to fuel our appetite for these works. If we put too many sanctions in place to ensure 'excellence' then we may dilute its effect, and thus its appeal for both artists and spectators. In this way, participatory practices become for contemporary art what reality television has become for broadcasting - fatigued and derivative; and what was once surprising emerges as a well-heeled performance device. One could argue that a decline in excitement and a manufactured appearance are merely symptomatic of participation's maturity. However, if we accept Lois Keidan's view that live art is the research engine for mass culture, which functions ten years ahead of the mainstream, then there is much to be learnt from the way in which live art defiantly resists easy categorisation (Live Art Development Agency 2016). Accordingly, live art 'offers a space in which artists can take formal and conceptual risks' and 'breaks the rules about who is making art, how they are making it and who they are making it for' (Ibid). In this way, I suggest that it is in live art where participation may be sustained as an artistic experience, rather than as an economical one. Live art's status as an underground and rebellious arts practice serves as a defense against commercialism, in spite of the appropriation of performance art by Lady Gaga and Jay Z's collaboration with Abramović on his music video for *Picasso Baby* (2013).

The danger of adopting a dramaturgy of participation is that by establishing a taught understanding of the practice and processes of participation in developing actors,

directors and writers, it may encourage a learnt behaviour of “good” spectatorship for audiences of this work. As Dominique Pasquier considers in her article “‘The Cacophony of Failure’: Being an audience in a traditional theatre’ (2015), ‘[t]he wish to maintain an ascetic approach might therefore put some audiences off from accessing theatre for the first time (Bourdieu 1984)’ (2015: 21). The risk is that the exchange underpinned by the dramaturgy of participation becomes one of academic perception rather than phenomenological experience. Furthermore, it makes the whole proposition much more marketable because it removes some of the precariousness that for some makes it too perilous. While this may seem to make it more accessible, at the same time it renders it even more elitist, as there are those that know the rules (the twists and gimmicks) and those that don’t. To distinguish a dramaturgy of participation may return the purpose of art to an aesthetic one, rather than as an oppositional space for the realisation of alternative social and political realities.

However, we do need to acknowledge the challenge that participation poses for directors and performers, and one might argue that these practices would be more effective if they were better communicated. Reflecting on my own experience directing immersive practice and as a performer with La Pocha Nostra, I have noted particular nuances in performer training towards fostering and managing an “active” audience. This may include understanding how to identify a willing participant, and managing a “difficult” spectator. It may in fact fall to the spectator to provide the ultimate antidote to a dramaturgy of participation, as a vital yet unknown element of a performance, which works against the fixing of the form.

Even though I am cautious of Maravala and Ramos's proposal, I am not opposed to the sharing of methodologies, and I agree that we must 'clearly articulate to audiences, funders, festivals and especially to artists committed to making such work, just how time consuming, expensive and complex a process of creating extraordinary experiences for active audiences is – especially when audiences are invited to interact' (Maravala and Ramos, 2016). Furthermore, as Adriana Disman suggests, 'we need to rethink the ways we are asking artists to legitimize and validate their art' (2015: 48). For these reasons, we do need to recognise spectator-participation as a practice in its own right. But, we must be careful not to reduce it to a training field of processes and practices that limit its creative potential. This doesn't mean that individual companies and artists shouldn't have their own dramaturgy of participation, and it is evident that Maravala and Ramos's approach offers a thoughtful consideration of the ethics of audience interaction. Following Reason, I propose that 'rather than looking always for overarching structures or grand narratives we look first at the particular qualities of the encounters and how these are received, remembered and valued' (2015: 280).

One way of analysing the encounters is through the conceptual frame of Machon's notion of "(syn)aesthetic performance" (Machon 2009: 14), which upholds participation's relationship to a feminised form. This application is supported by Machon's own use of her theory in defining *Immersive Theatres* (2013). In (syn)aesthetics she identifies three tenets of female practice that contribute to its categorisation. Firstly, 'the experimentation with transgressive form and content' which includes embracing hybridized artistic practices; secondly, the 'explicit use of the body in performance'; and finally, a knowing use of critical theory within the artistic practice

(Machon, 2009: 26). This thesis will demonstrate how these traits are present in the participatory encounters discussed.

It would appear that form is one of the areas on which critics and scholars of participation are divided. For some, its formlessness threatens the concept of how art is made and received. For others, this incompleteness enables it to become something else at any moment, which makes it a dynamic and potentially transformative mode of performance. Importantly, it is the supposed transformative capacity of participation which distinguishes it as a vehicle for social and political change.

2.6 The Political Status of Participation

In order to fully understand the meaning of participation, it is essential to consider the established relationship that it holds with political empowerment. Therefore, the next five sections will explore the notion of participation as a democratising of the art-making process, and the way that it affects binaries and borders in performance.

According to Bishop, Walter Benjamin was one of the first theorists to recognise the political status of participation;⁴⁰ she notes that ‘Benjamin maintained that the work of art should actively intervene in and provide a model for allowing viewers to be involved in the processes of production’ (2006: 11). For this reason, ‘a paradigm of physical involvement’ that sought to bring actors and spectators closer together fuelled the experiments of the avant-garde theatre of the ‘60s. Henceforth, participation was positioned as the forerunner of social change, which is an idea that persists today (Ibid., 11-12). Beech observes that participation has been treated as the solution to many of the issues surrounding conventional forms of cultural engagement and human relations

⁴⁰ See Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Author as Producer’ (1934) in *Understanding Brecht* (1998: 85–103).

(2010: 25). Similarly, Helen Freshwater notes that: ‘the belief in a connection between audience participation and political empowerment’ is one of the most revered and accepted views within theatre studies (2009: 3).

According to Bishop, the realisation of political empowerment through participation has largely been interpreted by practitioners in three ways: activation, authorship and community (2006: 12). First, activation can be understood as ‘the desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation’ (Ibid). Moreover, this underpins a prevalent ideology that these emancipated spectators will now feel galvanised to establish their own social and political existence. Second, authorship or rather the relinquishing of authorial control on the part of the artist is recognised as a democratising of the art making process, as well as returning ‘the aesthetic benefits of greater risk and unpredictability’ (Ibid). It could be said that Roland Barthes’s ‘Death of the Author’ (1967) has since spurred the ‘birth of the participant’. This collaborative imagining is seen to arise from and to support ‘a more positive and non-hierarchical social model’ (Ibid). Third, community or what is regarded as ‘a crisis in community and collective responsibility’ has underlined ‘a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning’ (Ibid). While these motivations cited by Bishop inform much of the discourse surrounding participation, it should be remembered that this list is not exhaustive. Artists use participation for a variety of reasons, not least because they want to feel closer to their audience as evidenced by the works exhibited at Home Live Art (HLA). Bishop maintains that the phenomenon of participation in contemporary culture has weakened its position, noting that:

[P]articipation is used by business as a tool for improving efficiency and workforce morale, as well as being all-pervasive in the mass-media in the form of reality television. As an artistic medium, then, participation is arguably no more intrinsically political or oppositional than any other. (2006: 11-12)

In addition, recent discourse on the commodification of participatory practices, framed by the experience economy, has suggested that these works frequently present a spectacle of politics rather than being inherently political. This thesis will follow Bishop to consider notions of activation, authorship and community within the case study works, to determine how political empowerment has been interpreted within these examples of participatory live art.

2.7 The Emancipated Spectator

One of the most prominent theories to challenge the claims made by participation is Jacques Rancière's writing on *The Emancipated Spectator* (2007, 2009). In this section, I look at the underlying principles of this philosophy; how it corresponds to issues and debates that surround participation; and informs the areas to be explored in this study. Rancière's treatise seeks to contest the presupposition that a participant-spectator is an emancipated subject. He maintains that the many arguments that have sought to undermine conventional theatre practice emerge out of a contradiction that he refers to as 'the paradox of the spectator':

There is no theater without spectators ... But spectatorship is a bad thing. Being a spectator means looking at a spectacle. And looking is a bad thing, for two reasons. First, looking is deemed the opposite of knowing. ... Second, looking is deemed the opposite of acting. He who looks at the spectacle remains motionless in his seat, lacking any power of intervention. Being a spectator means being passive. The spectator is separated from the capacity of knowing just as he is separated from the possibility of acting. (Rancière, 2007: 271-272)

Consequently, he notes that it has been implied that we need a new theatre or rather a return to what is perceived as the true essence of theatre, which has been interpreted in

two ways. The first is to release the spectator from the position of a passive viewer by confronting them with the spectacle of something strange that requires further investigation. The second is to ask the spectator to relinquish the role of observer and to be ‘drawn into the magical power of theatrical action’ (Rancière, 2007: 272). I propose that the case studies at the heart of this thesis exemplify and offer some of the most extreme interpretations of both models. Reason considers that ‘in the legacy of an overly comfortable binary between active and passive spectatorship’ there is a belief that: ‘performances that engage audiences actively through participation also emancipate and empower and are consequently radically liberating’ (2015: 272). This perspective can be seen to respond to the issue of externality identified in Guy Debord’s critique (1967), which proposes that forms of spectacle are the reign of vision and vision means externality (Rancière 2007: 274).

Rancière’s philosophy challenges Debord’s notion of externality, especially the implication that vision separates the viewer from his own being; therefore, rebuffing his statement that ‘the more man contemplates, the less he lives’ (Debord 1967: 30 cited in Rancière 2007: 274). Bishop points out that it is telling that the three main concerns of participation - activation, authorship and community - also appear in the writing of Debord, ‘since it is invariably against the backdrop of his critique of capitalist “spectacle” that debates on participation come to be staged’ (2006: 12). She notes that in the foreground of these discussions is Debord’s contention that, ‘[t]he spectacle - as a social relationship between people mediated by images - is pacifying and divisive, uniting us only through our separation from one another’ (Ibid). Instead, Debord advocates what he terms as “constructed situations”, which advance the Brechtian model of awakening the audience’s critical awareness. Subsequently, this redefines the

function of the audience from viewer to *viveur* (one who lives) (Bishop 2006a: 12-13). The aim of these situations was to ‘produce new social relationships and thus new social realities’ (Ibid). It is significant that Debord locates this arts practice in participatory events that use experimental behaviour to ‘break the spectacular bind of capitalism’ (Debord, 1967 in Bishop, 2006b: 96).

Current discourse on the commodification of participatory practices suggests that the society of the spectacle has in actuality been replaced by a spectacle of sociability and politics, or as Bourriaud’s puts it: ‘the society of extras’ (2002: 26). This is a situation that is epitomised by our advancement into the era of the social network, whereupon web-based platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become the focus of communication, relationships, and political debates. However, like social media, Gritzner questions whether participation may in fact mask social fragmentation and alienation, stating that: ‘[p]articipatory performances may seem to respond to the desire for immediacy and relevance but remain, like all art, an illusion, a semblance (appearance)’ (2011: 109). The analysis of my encounters with La Pocha Nostra’s practice highlights the provisional nature of the relationships and “micro-topias” (Bourriaud 2002) formed through participation, discussed in chapter three. This demonstrates that while participation may seem to respond to our need for real meetings with real bodies, when all is said and done, it is a performance. Reason emphasises Rancière’s claim that ‘the audience as active participant is forever in danger of becoming lost in a form of “consumerist hyper-activism”’ (Reason 2015: 274). He goes on to suggest that this has ‘echoes of the concept of “false consciousness”, in which the consumer is manipulated into imagining that they have choice and power while in fact and at the same time voluntarily surrendering their freedoms’ (Ibid). This argument will

be brought into focus in my analysis of agency and the display of agency in chapter four, drawing on the recent research of Astrid Breel.

The principle of giving the audience agency is largely founded on Rancière's 'paradox of spectatorship', and a desire to make the spectator more actively engaged in the performance. Conversely, the philosopher argues that the opposition between looking and knowing is reductive; henceforth, he proceeds to question the whole set of relations upon which theatre is based (Rancière 2007: 277). He proposes that rather than reinvent the theatre, we should rethink the way in which we value binary pairs, asking:

What makes it possible to pronounce the spectator seated in her place inactive, if not the previously posited radical opposition between the active and the passive? ... These oppositions - viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, activity/passivity - are quite different from logical oppositions between clearly defined terms. ... They are embodied allegories of inequality. That is why we can change the value of the terms, transform a 'good' term into a 'bad' one and vice versa, without altering the functioning of the opposition itself. (Rancière 2009: 12)

To follow Rancière, a spectator is considered inferior to the performer because they simply watch the action unfolding, whereas the performer is physically doing something on stage. But, if we rethink the value of these positions, we may suppose that the performer is inferior to the spectator because they are physically put to work, whereas the spectator is in the enviable position of reflecting on and evaluating the action. The opposition and inequality between these two positions remains, but the positions are switched (Rancière 2009: 12). However, although this interpretation may empower the passive spectator, it is to the detriment of the performer. Rancière asserts that it is not a case of reversing these binary positions, but recognising that the structure of these oppositions creates two categories: those who possess a capacity and those who do not. Subsequently, he proposes that emancipation emerges out of a principle of equality between the two sides; beginning with challenging the opposition between looking and

acting. Rancière maintains that: ‘The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. ... She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way ... They are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them’ (Ibid., 13). Therefore, according to Rancière, a passive spectator is able to actively engage in a performance precisely because of their distance from the action; the border provides them with the space to make connections between the reality on stage and in their own life.

Yet, a criticism of Rancière’s writing (raised by Freshwater 2009: 17, White 2013: 22 and Reason 2015: 275) is that there is limited engagement with actual theatre practice. Furthermore, as Reason notes, his theory is entirely divorced from actual audiences (2015: 275). Julie Wilkinson attempts to address these issues in her analysis of Rancière’s envisaging of ‘the spectator as a partner in the interpretation of their experience of watching a performance’ (2015: 133). The investigation used creative and dialogic research methods including workshops, questionnaires and interviews with audience members, to examine how they make connections between their theatre experience and their own personal narratives, as implied by Rancière (Ibid., 134). Wilkinson’s analysis found that one’s personal narrative is directly affected by a shared narrative between spectators, stating:

[E]very spectator must negotiate not only with the reactions of fellow audience members at a particular performance, but with sets of unspoken but shared cultural values, with powerful emotional and social significance. These tramlines of collective memory underscore our personal associations. Rancière’s active spectator is never an isolated subject. (2015: 142)

This notion of a shared narrative corresponds to Nicholas Ridout’s “ethics of encounter”, discussed in chapter five, which draws on the writing of Levinas (1969, 1989) to establish that ethics may be less about the self and more about someone else.

Wilkinson's study bears out Rancière's argument that spectators can be imaginatively emancipated through their active translating of the performance, which enables them to shape their understanding of the images presented in relation to their own personal narrative. Nevertheless, the research also draws attention to the fact that there are shared cultural values and narrative conventions which undermine the agency of the watching-spectator and affect the way in which we process the experience. This challenges Rancière's proposal that a spectator is 'an actor in *his* own story' (Rancière 2007: 279 emphasis mine), and suggests that a more radical emancipation of the spectator is needed if they are to be free from a culturally imposed narrative.

The duality between the spectator and actor roles, implied by Rancière, converges with Caroline Heim's writing on the *Audience as Performer* (2016) which suggests that in mainstream theatre 'there are two troupes of performers: actors and audience members' (Heim, 2016: 4). She establishes that just as the actors are playing a role on stage; the audience are playing the role of the audience. Furthermore, while there is a tendency to consider those observing as being in a position of judgement as they critique the merits of the performance, the actors are similarly critiquing the performance of the audience: 'the actors are the audience's audience' (Ibid., 22). Heim highlights the backstage and dressing room chatter, where actors reflect on what the audience is like and how receptive they are to the production (Ibid., 4). This suggests that in the mind of the performer, the spectator is conceived as an active participant – even if their activity manifests as passivity or even sleep. However, the same may not be true in the mind of the spectator, especially if their presence is largely unacknowledged for the duration of the performance. The distance between the stage and the auditorium might enable the spectator to gain greater perspective on the stories

told, but it may also relinquish them of their responsibility to the other side of the border. There have been many occasions when I have attended a mainstream theatre production and part way through noted a sleeping spectator. As Pasquier observes, sleeping is seen by some audience members as a polite way of showing disinterest, inasmuch as it doesn't upset the action on the stage (2015: 229).

According to Anna Fenemore, immersive practices establish performance conditions that encourage a state of wakefulness (2011: 43). These tactics preclude the audience from disengaging their brain, to encourage active engagement. Consequently, they bring the audience much more into the view of the audience's audience: the performers. The presence of the audience is both acknowledged and counted on to realise the form of the performance. While the audience for conventional theatre have always 'held the power of making or breaking a play by attendance or abstention' and are 'ultimately responsible for sustaining the performance' (Burns 1972: 184-5 in Bennett 1997: 18), a play can still function with little to no audience. In participatory performance the production is not complete without the input of spectators; they are part of the script, they are part of the set, they matter. Moreover, the watching-spectators, who identify with the participating bodies as an extension of themselves, are also reminded of their own presence and responsibility for the performance. I will provide a detailed discussion on the significance of presence and responsibility in relation to participation in chapters four and five.

Rancière offers an alternative perspective on the predisposition for participation in his assertion that the main focus of dramaturges is to get the spectator to do something,

to move from being passive to active, even if they don't know exactly what they want the spectator to do (2007: 277). He observes that:

[C]rossing borders and blurring the distribution of roles are defining characteristics of theater and of contemporary art today, when all artistic competences stray from their own field and exchange places and powers with all others ... as a means of increasing the power of the performance without questioning its grounds. (Rancière 2007: 280)

Similarly, Beech pinpoints an over-emphasis on redressing the power of the author as one of the main restrictions on contemporary arts practice (2010: 28). Furthermore, Hal Foster warns in his essay 'Chat Rooms' that participation is in danger of being pursued for its own sake, stating that, 'we might not be too far from an artworld version of 'flash mobs' – of 'people meeting people' (Foster 2004 in Bishop 2006a: 194). These criticisms also converge with conversations on the spectacle of participation (see Bishop 2006a, 2006b, 2012; see also Harvie 2013).

Beech maintains that it is essential to the critique of participation that we accept it as a form of cultural engagement that has its own limitations and subjectivities. This begins with recognising that participation requires the participant to accept the parameters of the art event, rather than to evaluate or subvert what takes place (Beech in Walwin 2010: 25). One of the most frequent criticisms of participation is the way that it often invites the spectator to enter into a predetermined role, which ultimately makes them complicit in the work. Therefore, rather than cast as an agent of critique or as an emancipated spectator, the participant may in fact be more under the artist's control than from a distant position (Ibid). However, Zerihan notes that part of the excitement of participation is 'the opportunity it affords the spectator to immerse themselves in the performance framework set out by the practitioner' (Zerihan, 2009: 5). Furthermore, it is the imposed framework of the performance which permits the spectator to experience

emancipation from their everyday self by removing the need to take responsibility for their actions. In this way, ‘the performance told me to do it’ becomes a defence against outside judgement, and even our own feelings of regret or remorse which may come later. This thesis will reflect on the parameters for engagement within the context of the case study works, as well as discussing the notion of agency more broadly in chapter four.

A further criticism of the claims made on behalf of participatory performance is its communitarian potential. Rancière bases his dismissal of this belief on the principle that there is nothing more communal about spectators watching a theatre show from them watching the same television programme at the same time. This may be especially true in the case of reality television shows like the *X Factor*, where the audience is able to react in the real time of the live transmission as if they were part of the live audience, who they may also feel akin to. However, Rancière’s argument does not acknowledge the relationship formed between the ‘two troupes of performers: actors and audience members’ (Heim, 2016: 4). This thesis will demonstrate how performance has the power to create a palpable exchange of energy between the performer and the spectator, which is particularly discernible when the two are in close proximity. For Rancière, an audience’s collective power is brought forth by an equality of intelligences that allows spectators to intellectually connect with the work (Rancière 2007: 278). He writes that: ‘It calls for spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it’ (Rancière 2007: 280). However, we have seen that ‘an equality of intelligences’ is in actuality constrained by shared cultural values and narrative conventions (Wilkinson 2015: 142). Nevertheless, as I discussed in chapter one, Rancière’s claim that ‘[a]n

emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators' (2007: 280) may well be realised by scholars in the field of immersive and participatory practices, who become narrators of their own embodied experiences of research.

Rancière's writing influences my analysis of the way in which spectators' are emancipated within the case study performances. Moreover, it underpins my rethinking of how we value the two sides of binary relations. Yet, in my consideration of live art, this thesis extends the meaning of Rancière's concept of "the emancipated spectator". It shifts the emphasis from spectators being released from their seat in the audience, to the notion of spectators being activated and invited to co-produce the work in some way. As such, the study explores the notion of "the emancipated spectator" as a participant who is freed from their everyday self and social reality.

2.8 The Transformative Power of Participation

Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (2008) provides a different reading from Rancière on the potential of participation. Even though her theory acknowledges that there are limitations to participation, it advocates its capacity to transform participants, binary relations and borders in performance. Fischer-Lichte notes several shared practices to emerge out of experiments with actor and spectator-participation:

The staging strategies or game instructions devised for such experiments play with three closely related processes: first, the *role reversal* of actors and spectators; second, the *creation of a community* between them; and third, the creation of various modes of mutual, physical *contact* that help explore the interplay between proximity and distance, public and private, or visual and tactile contact. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 40)

The role reversal of actors and spectators, according to Fischer-Lichte, acts as a 'magnifying glass' to bring in to focus the unpredictable process of audience reception

(2008: 43). Additionally, she notes that their bodily co-presence in the act of participation has the capability to destabilise the dichotomous subject/object relationship. This connects to my earlier point regarding the communitarian potential of performers and spectators. Fischer-Lichte maintains that unsettling the subject/object binary in turn challenges the traditional opposition between art, theatre, and social event, which subsequently re-establishes the bond between the aesthetic, social, and political in performance (2008: 43-44). This role reversal affords ‘an opportunity for actors and spectators to physically experience community with another group from which they were originally excluded’, which can have both aesthetic and political implications (2008: 55). The notion of groups was previously touched on in relation to Heim’s theorising, I will return to the subject in chapter five, where I will apply Erving Goffman’s notion of “teams”.

In Fischer-Lichte’s examination of the role reversal of actors and spectators, she outlines how it draws attention to the “autopoietic feedback loop” (2008: 40). The term “autopoietic” is significant here; ‘auto’ is a derivative of the Greek meaning of “self” and ‘poiesis’ is Greek for “creation, production”. The combination of these terms produces a concept that refers to a system capable of reproducing and maintaining itself, which in the context of this study refers to the performance’s capacity to ‘hold itself together’ (Howell, 2000: 55-56). According to Fischer-Lichte the feedback loop is a ‘self-organizing system’ that incorporates all emerging elements of the performance. Central to this process is the emergence of spectators’ actions and performers’ reactions, which is more striking in work where participation occurs. The feedback loop relies on the mutual interaction between actors and spectators to produce the performance, rather than the suggestion that the artist is the sole creator. Fischer-Lichte states:

The perceptible workings of the autopoietic feedback loop, apparent in all forms of role reversal between actors and spectators, allows all participants to experience themselves as co-determinate participants of the action. Neither fully autonomous nor fully determined by others ... Herein lies a fundamental component of aesthetic experience that enables the autopoiesis of the feedback loop. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 164-165)

This notion of the “autopoietic feedback loop” corresponds to my theorising of binary relations in the situation of participation as interdependent, applying Nora Bateson’s term “symmathesy”, discussed in chapter three. Fischer-Lichte emphasises that it is the reciprocal relationship of negotiation between the performer and the spectator in the feedback loop that makes transformation implicit, as every turn can also be recognised as a transition from one state to another (2008: 50). Also, in chapter three, I determine that the improvised decisions between co-participants can be seen to drive the “autopoietic feedback loop”.

Fischer-Lichte identifies role reversal as a principle strategy in working towards a shared authorial responsibility for performance. Nonetheless, she contemplates whether the responsibility of the performance is really equal for both artist and spectators, given that the artist is expected to develop the work in the first instance and the audience are merely asked to respond to it (2008: 163). Fischer-Lichte suggests that, ‘[it] is essential to ask whether role reversal establishes a community of co-subjects or merely recreates the old relationship in a new guise’, although she concedes that there is no clear answer (2008: 40).

In contrast to Rancière, Fischer-Lichte recognises the communitarian potential of theatre (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 23), but she considers that participation (invited or not) has the potential to disrupt rather than enhance the feeling of togetherness amongst the audience (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 15). Likewise, Howell is concerned that participation

can disturb rather than strengthen spectatorship, stating that '[i]f individual participation is demanded, the audience's unity may be destroyed' (Howell 2000: P56). This notion underlines Beech's proposition, drawing on Rancière, that participation can be socially divisive, by separating those that do from those that don't participate (Beech in Walwin 2010: 25). In this thesis I will establish that participation can create a new hierarchy of spectatorship, discussed in chapter three. Furthermore, Fischer-Lichte highlights that the early experiments with participation produced 'short-lived, transient theatrical communities of actors and spectators', as participants were only united through their mutual involvement in a set of actions for the length of the performance (2008: 55). This coincides with Gritzner's emphasis on the illusory nature of participation (Gritzner 2011: 109). Still, all the same, Fischer-Lichte suggests that although short-lived, these communities serve to represent the union of the aesthetic and the social in performance. While the community may only be realised for an aesthetic purpose, its members experience it as a social reality (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 55).

A further development to this argument is the way that a proliferation of social media platforms can potentially extend the longevity of a community formed during participatory performance. Participants can find sites such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr places of reunion, where they can experience togetherness once more, through their shared retelling of their experiences. In this way, the social reality experienced by a community produced during participation is translated into a social media reality. This creates a paradoxical arrangement in which the members of that community, who are in part motivated by a desire to engage with real bodies, find their connection prolonged by technology.

However, following Rebecca Schneider's concept of "the document performance" (2008), it should be recognised that the community reunited online will not be the same community as constituted in the live performance. Firstly, the community brought together by a platform such as Twitter will interact within the parameters of that particular space, time and ethical code, which is different from the frame of their live experience. Secondly, where a performance has been repeated, it may result in multiple communities of participants coming together, demonstrated by the Twitter feed for #512hours. Nevertheless, while the community manifested online has a different constitution to that formed in the live performance, it still functions to bring together the aesthetic and the social in performance, as Fischer-Lichte has suggested, albeit in the document performance.

Returning to the processes that foster participation, Fischer-Lichte proposes that the 'mutual physical contact' of performers and spectators is capable of collapsing the established binary between seeing and touching, and with it 'a number of other interrelated oppositional pairs: public vs. private, distance vs. proximity, fiction vs. reality' (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 62). Her analysis traces the traditional lack of physical contact in performance back to the early definition of "theatre" (Greek *theatron* from *theasthai* = to see, to behold; *thea* = a view) as a form concerned with seeing. She argues that the binary between seeing and touching is still evident in theatre today, as theatre (to see) belongs to the public realm, whereas touching is associated with a more intimate encounter (2008: 60). However, as chapter four will infer, intimacy in recent years has been adopted by the public realm as part of the experience economy. While all of the case study performances feature moments of mutual physical contact between the artist/performer and the spectator, I suggest that the mutual physical contact between

co-participants also challenges the binary of seeing and touching in the context of the audience.

Fischer-Lichte supports her undoing of the opposition between seeing and touching by referring to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work, 'The Intertwining-The Chiasm', in which he states:

We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. (Merleau-Ponty 1968 in Fischer-Lichte 2008: 133)

The notion that seeing and touching are inextricably bound together coincides with Rancière's dismantling of the opposition between viewing and knowing. Furthermore, Fischer-Lichte implies that this undoing has consequences for the other dichotomous relationships in the theatre (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 62), which includes the binary of inside/outside of performance. This also offers several points of convergence with Cixous's *écriture féminine*, particularly her conception that the "eyes are lips" (Cixous 2001: 9), elucidated in chapter five. Fischer-Lichte's adoption of Merleau-Ponty's "phenomenology of perception" prepares the way for interpreting participation as a phenomenological encounter. Similarly, Machon's theory of "(syn)aesthetics" is informed by Merleau-Ponty's philosophical modelling of sensory perception. Importantly, these discourses will underpin my analysis of the phenomenology of participation and how this is manifested into presence, explored over the course of chapter four.

According to Fischer-Lichte, when performers and spectators touch each other in performance “reenchantment” is made possible, noting that:

It does not call upon all human beings to govern over nature – neither their own nor that surrounding them – but instead encourages them to enter into a new relationship with themselves and the world. This relationship is not determined by an “either/or” situation but by an “as well as.” The reenchantment of the world is inclusive rather than exclusive; it asks everyone to act in life as in performance. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 207)

The call for a new set of relations that are inclusive rather than exclusive can be likened to Rancière’s argument that there should be greater equality between binary positions. However, whereas Rancière proposes a re-evaluation of how we value the two opposing sides of relational pairs, Fischer-Lichte identifies a potential model of inclusivity within participatory performance. The notion of “reenchantment” - which suggests that we were once “enchanted” and no longer are – emerges out of and in response to modernity. In particular, it arises from the philosopher Max Weber’s envisaging of “the disenchantment of the world”, defined as ‘the knowledge or belief that . . . there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation’ (Weber 1946: 139). Fischer-Lichte’s critique suggests that crossing borders in performance enables participants to transcend intellectualisation and rationalisation to perceive the world anew, with all the magical and mysterious energies that it imparts. More crucially, she sees the participant’s reenchantment as a doubling process, wherein they take their newfound perception into their own life, which in itself destabilises the binary between art and reality. For Fischer-Lichte, participation is not simply a matter of crossing borders, rather ‘[t]he border turns into a frontier and a threshold, which does not separate but connects. . . . It is an attempt to reenchant the world by transforming the borders established in the eighteenth century and opening them up into thresholds’ (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 204). Fischer-Lichte’s

critique on participation underscores my thinking at various points in the study, most notably in my analysis of La Pocha Nostra's practice in chapter three. It is here that the constitution of the border as a threshold is brought into focus in my examination of processes that work towards nurturing participation, which owes much to Fischer-Lichte's analysis. The way that her theory is also underscored by her research on ritual (2005) usefully corresponds to my reading of participatory live art through the lens of "interactive rituals". I also propose that Fischer-Lichte's notion of "reenchantment" offers a conceptual frame for understanding participatory live art as a form of empowerment that enables alternative political and social realities to come into being.

2.9 Radical Democratic Participation

To further understand the political potential of participation, this section will explore Tony Fisher's writing on *Radical Democratic Theatre* (2011), especially his claim that it can destabilise existing structures (borders) to open up 'a space for speech' where alternative forms of social reality might be realised. Fisher maintains that radical democratic theatre as a form of participatory performance, neither claims to be communitarian, nor insists on the emancipation of the spectator. Instead, he proposes that the purpose of radical democratic theatre is 'the promotion and activation of democratic politics' (Fisher 2011: 23). Central to this agenda is not freedom from oppression, as found in Augusto Boal's⁴³ model of participation, but 'the destabilization of the relational space in which political identities are first configured' (2011: 15). Therefore, the focus of participation moves to equality rather than freedom (Ibid).

Fisher states:

⁴³ Augusto Boal's "Theater of the Oppressed" was started in the early 1970s and is a participatory form of theatre that stimulates democratic modes of interaction between its "spect-actors". See Boal (1979) for a full account.

Radical democratic theatre cannot ‘liberate’ anyone but it can destabilize the matrices of a given political distribution and in particular release thereby what politics has suppressed – first, antagonism and dissent, and second, forms of reciprocal action and empathetic identification on which new forms of sociality might be based. (Fisher 2011: 15)

This thesis will explore the way that the performances under discussion disrupt established political and social structures. However, as I mentioned in chapter one, Bishop has argued that antagonism is frequently lacking in participatory work; predicated on social harmony, participation often denies the possibility of resistance or meaningful interrogation of the art (2004: 67). Bishop’s argument will underlie discussions concerning the agency of the audience and the possibility of dissent within the works under analysis. I will also examine how reciprocal action in participation has the capacity to bring forth empathetic identification, or what Fischer-Lichte refers to as the doubling process of reenchantment.

Fisher recognises that there are a number of shared characteristics between the theatre of the oppressed and the more recent model of radical democratic theatre. Central to both theatrical strategies is a democratising of the stage space and the equality of the performer and spectator (2011: 18). Fisher tells us that for Boal, ‘theatre designates a specific structure of domination in which the audience is rendered inert insofar as it is the addressee of the theatre spectacle’ (Fisher 2011: 19). The organisation of the stage space can then be seen as forming an ‘oppressive relation’, which separates ‘those who are entitled to act and make decisions, from those designated the recipients of those actions’ (Ibid), thus rendering the spectator as passive. This echoes Rancière’s assessment that theatre is premised on binary relations that create two perspectives - those who possess a capacity and those who do not. Like Rancière, Fisher calls for ‘an alternative way of thinking the oppressive relation which takes account of the ambiguity

constitutive of social antagonisms’ (Fisher 2011: 21). He suggests that the nucleus of radical democratic theatre is the dual process of destabilising the structures of domination and opening up new possibilities for political engagement and resistance (2011: 24). In this way, I propose that the activist art of La Pocha Nostra epitomises radical democratic theatre.

Fisher claims that participation interrogates ‘the arraignment of power’ by opening up a ‘space of speech’ (2011: 25). This liminal, albeit temporal, ‘space’ is what gives participatory practice its *raison d’être*, as a place where the everyday is disrupted by the ‘extra-everyday of performance’, to use White’s language (2013: 5). Fisher maintains that: ‘if radical democratic theatre is able to produce political ‘effects’, it is because it is able to provide the means for the effective suspension of the conditions of operation through which a structure of domination produces its effects’ (2011: 26). However, I propose that while participation may have the ability to destabilise established ‘structures of domination’, it also has the capacity to produce new hierarchies of power. This is discussed further in chapter three, where I will also unravel the political effects created by La Pocha Nostra’s performances.

2.10 Ontological Participation

While most of the theoretical perspectives discussed so far have dealt with the political dimension to participation, I now wish to highlight Laura Cull’s (2011) concept of “ontological participation” which focuses on the experiential aspect of this practice. The concept of ontological participation is underpinned by Cull’s reading of Gilles Deleuze’s theory of immanence, along with Henri Bergson’s writing on “attention” which she conceives as a state of ontological participation that reconsiders the

relationship between participation and observation. Furthermore, as intimated in chapter one, she identifies Allan Kaprow's "activities" as a physical manifestation of ontological participation, drawing parallels to his concepts of "lived change" and "experienced insight". The term "ontological participation" is used to define a kind of audience interaction that manifests as 'an actual experience (rather than contemplation or inference) of [the] metaphysical real, whether we locate this experience in the realm of "philosophy", "art" or life' (Cull 2011: 80). According to Cull, it is ontological participation or taking part in the real that produces what we might recognise as feelings and thoughts; therefore, it can be deemed as philosophical in itself (2011: 81).

In a similar way to Rancière, Cull contests the privileging of participatory performance, noting that it does not necessarily produce ontological participation. Moreover, she similarly reasons that observational forms of theatre are also capable of encouraging us to interact in the metaphysical real (Ibid). Following Rancière, Cull sets out to further dispel the divide between participation and observation, establishing attention in action or looking in the midst of doing as a form of participation (Ibid). Later in the essay, she departs from Rancière's philosophy by disputing the emphasis he places on language and narrative, evidenced in his discussion on spectators as active interpreters and translators (2011: 87).

Turning to Cull's interpretation of participation as an immanent encounter, Deleuze's philosophy challenges the way that our understanding of experience is founded on binary relations. The notion of immanence is defined throughout Deleuze's oeuvre, but particularly in his last texts where he arrives at the notion of pure immanence. He writes: 'We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not

immanence to life ... A life is the immanence of immanence: absolute immanence' (Deleuze 2001: 27 in Cull 2011: 82). This proposes that there is only one form of being in the world, a single dimension, without the possibility of being 'outside' of this existence. As Cull notes, an immanent perspective resists the ontological separation of thought and being, subject and object, and more broadly, body and mind, self and others, theory and practice and so forth (Cull 2011: 82). This destabilising of the way in which we understand binaries has resonances with the writings of Rancière, Fischer-Lichte, and Fisher; however, Cull's theory of ontological participation is the most radical in the way that it rebuffs all forms of separation. For this reason, she identifies that: 'there is something fundamentally participatory about Deleuze's immanent philosophy. Participation comes first, it contends; the organisation (or 'stratification') of what is into distinct categories or 'things' is a secondary phenomenon, and indeed a divisive one, that we should seek to undo' (Cull 2011: 82). In this way, Cull's argument corresponds to my point that in our analysis of participatory performance, we should not lose sight of the experience *itself*. It is in the thought of an absolute state of being that Cull finds a clear union between participation and immanence.

The undoing of dichotomous relations also coincides with Deleuze's synthesis of immanence as underpinned by pluralism and difference, which informs Cull's conception of participation as 'a constantly differing process that actually unsettles our powers of recognition' (Ibid). This assessment contrasts with a phenomenological reading that pertains to presence as a self or mutual determining process. In Cull's analysis of Kaprow's activities she notes that they construct the real in terms of an ontology of change or what Kaprow calls "lived change" which is embodied by the participant-spectator (Cull 2011: 83). She reflects that:

What there is, is change or difference which we take part in ‘automatically’, as it were. But art might allow us to feel this participation more deeply, to attend to it and indeed, to its ethical and political implications. In turn, both lived change and ontological participation are fundamentally embodied activities, but crucially, both are also premised on a refusal of any mind/body opposition. (Cull 2011: 83)

On the surface this rejection of a Cartesian dualism⁴¹ might appear to correspond to the way that Merleau-Ponty undermines the opposition between the visible and the tangible (Merleau-Ponty 1968 in Fischer-Lichte 2008: 133). Yet, Deleuze’s concept of immanence denies the transcendental logic of phenomenology, which is often purported by participation, and is founded on one’s actual bodily relation to the world rather than acknowledging an irrational and supernatural element to the experience. Therefore, whereas Fischer-Lichte imagines that embodied participation can bring forth ‘the reenchantment of the world’, Cull sees it as affording an extended window of perception. Drawing on Howard Caygill’s (2011) reading of Bergson, she notes that: ‘the point is that “we see much more than our consciousness allows us to see” and we need to find ways to access that extra-conscious perception (Caygill 2011: n.p.)’ (Cull 2011: 87). This follows Bergson’s view that ‘[l]ife demands that we put on blinders’ (Bergson, 1992 [1934]: 137 in Cull, 2011: 87). For Cull, ontological participation cultivates a particular kind of attention which enables the participant to remove these ‘blinders’. Thus, permitting our capacity for change and to be changed by others; and ‘growing in the midst of things’ instead of being irrevocably separated from them (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 280 in Cull 2011: 91).

⁴¹ René Descartes is the most famous proponent of substance dualism, commonly referred to as Cartesian dualism after the philosopher, which advocates that the mind and the body are distinct entities. See Descartes (1996) for the founding philosophy for this concept.

Ontological participation develops and responds to existing critiques on participation, most notably Rancière's writing on the emancipated spectator. Importantly, it offers an alternative interpretation of the way in which we perceive participation, and emphasises the significance of the experience *itself*. However, reflecting on my own encountering, the discussion on "the paradox of participation" in the next chapter articulates my difficulty accepting participation as an immanent encounter which denies an outside perspective.

2.11 Conclusion

In the first half of this chapter we have looked at the varying definitions of audience participation to arrive at a special kind of engagement which is 'exceptional' and 'goes beyond' our pre-conceptions of spectatorship (White 2013: 4). It is this form of audience participation that is fostered in the works under analysis, which typically functions at the interactive level of Pelias and VanOosting's taxonomy (1987), wherein the performer and spectator can be seen to function as co-producers of the experience. My analysis has outlined participation as a multi-faceted and contradictory notion that is best thought of as mutable rather than as a fixed form. Indeed, Gritzner has suggested that participatory art practices only achieve their form through the act of participation. This inherent fluidity coincides with a 'feminine morphology' of form which remains in a constant state of becoming (Irigaray 1999 [1991]: 55 in Machon 2009: 43). Moreover, it is indicative of the way in which participation yields evolving manifestations of presence and ethics in performance.

Nonetheless, I have highlighted how the idea of formlessness in participation has been interpreted by critics as both enabling and limiting. I am wary of Maravala and

Ramos's argument for the dramaturgy of participation and their proposition that 'immersive theatre is a skill that can, and must, be taught' (2016). I propose that if we are too instructive on the way that participation operates, it becomes the spectacle of participation rather than an actual invitation for spectators to participate in the performance in a meaningful way. Yet, I am mindful that we need to accept that spectator-participation is evolving into a nuanced area of practice that requires a specific set of understandings. To this end, I have suggested that we consider spectator-participation as a practice in its own right.

In my theorising of the form of participation in the works under discussion, I frame it as belonging to a visceral and (syn)aesthetic tradition (Machon 2009). Consequently, I identify several characteristics that are consistent with a feminised style, namely transgression, hybridity, the explicit body, and embodied theory. These qualities are also shared with the broader categorisation of live art practice, and are indicative of the way in which participation has emerged out of a performance art tradition.

In the second half of the chapter we looked to Bishop (2006) to uncover the motivations and claims made on behalf of participation, and explored some of the main arguments levelled against this type of practice. This has included questioning the level of activity; the extent to which co-authorship is really shared; and acknowledging how participation can be socially divisive, replacing the hierarchy of artist over spectator with a pecking order of participant over watcher. I also analyse the communitarian potential of participation and its longevity, and how this might be reconfigured and extended through the use of social media platforms. On the one hand, I have argued that participation as a political and democratic process is a somewhat idealistic view, and

one which does not necessarily lead to an emancipated spectator. On the other hand, I propose that participation has revitalised the audience's relationship to performance, with the potential to create a 'space for speech' (Fisher 2011) where alternative realities, relationships and narratives may be realised, if only until the performance has ended.

One of the most pertinent arguments to emerge from this chapter is a disassembling of the binary between observation and participation, as it shifts assumptions about audience experience and the constitution of performance. Rancière (2007, 2009) suggests that we should question how we attribute value to the two sides of oppositional pairs, beginning with looking and acting. Fischer-Lichte's (2008) critique sees the mutual physical contact produced by participation, as a way of undoing the related dichotomy of seeing and touching, which in turn disturbs the whole set of relations on which performance is founded (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 62). Cull's (2011) theory draws on Bergson's writing and Kaprow's practice to distinguish a form of "attention" that arises from looking in the midst of doing, therefore, combining observation and participation. Moreover, she adopts Deleuze's concept of immanence in her conception of participatory experience, to undo the notion of binaries in exchange for an absolute state of being (Cull 2011: 82).

On account of these arguments, I maintain that participation as a form of attention has the capacity to unsettle the perceived relational foundations of performance. At the same time, it should be recognised that for participation to manifest as an embodied experience there must be a meaningful investment in the act of doing rather than simply viewing the unfolding action. To reiterate my earlier statement: the more that is given in participation, the more that is taken in participation. Chapter three will reveal my

struggle to deny the existence of binaries in participation, as purported by Cull's ontological participation, particularly the separation of the mind/body and being inside/outside of the experience (Cull 2011: 83). However, I support Cull's line of reasoning that to see participation as a series of 'distinct categories or "things"' misses the point of these complex interactions. To this end, the study proposes that we should rethink the relational aesthetics of participation to focus on their interdependency, framed by Nora Bateson's (2016) concept of "symmathesy", which is outlined in chapter three.

In addition to the unravelling of binaries in participatory performance, it would appear that the contrasting theories of Rancière and Fischer-Lichte converge to offer a fluid notion of the relationship between borders and spectatorship. Fischer-Lichte advocates that borders should be turned into thresholds that connect the spectator to the transformative possibilities of performance. This standpoint is reinforced by Fisher, who imagines a space where established structures of domination are suspended and new forms of democratic politics and resistance are opened up. Conversely, Rancière regards the border as providing the necessary critical distance for the spectator to experience freedom of interpretation, and to make connections between the action and their personal narrative. However, Wilkinson has drawn attention to the way that spectators are also influenced by cultural convention and the shared narrative of the audience; thus they are not an 'isolated subject' (2015: 142). Nonetheless, open or closed, threshold or barrier, active or passive, by applying the related principle of Fischer-Lichte and Rancière and replacing an oppositional structure of "either/or" with one of "as well as", we may allow for the possibility that borders are capable of producing more than one kind of emancipated spectator. While this chapter serves to

highlight some of the shortcomings of participatory live art, my own experiences and the debates surrounding the work bear witness to the fact that this is an exciting place to be in art in the twenty first century. As the subsequent chapters testify, these practices push the boundaries of performance, as old borders collapse and new ones are drawn up.

Chapter Three: Border Crossing and “Interactive Rituals”

3.1 The Third Encounter: La Pocha Nostra’s Untitled Performance at MOCA, Tucson, Arizona (2007)

It is August 2007. I am sitting on a plane on my way to Tucson, Arizona. I am about to embark on a 10-day rehearsal process with La Pocha Nostra as a collaborating artist with the company, which will culminate in a performance at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA). It is during this performance that I experience spectator-participation from the other side of the border. Looking out at the sea of spectators, to the cries of Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s familiar plea: “Is there anyone who is willing to co-create with me?” my eyes quickly settle on a young woman in a white floral dress with a bow in her hair. It was with some trepidation that she left her male companion and took my hand. I am in the guise of a *twenty-first century blonde- “bomb” shell* (see Figure 4). My crossed legs conceal my bruised inner thighs (make up) and I am wearing a strap-on camouflage decorated dildo. Written down my back are the words ‘destrucción masiva’, see Figure 5, in reference to the Bush administration’s justification for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

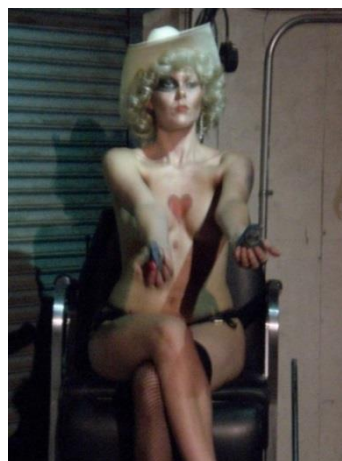


Figure 4: Twenty-first century blonde- “bomb” shell. Author’s own image.

Gómez-Peña claims that over the course of their radical performance pedagogy, participants can ‘become artistically extroverted within a week’ (2005: 135). In the photographs of the MOCA performance, I am barely recognisable from the person in the images from *Ex Centris*. While bare chested in both, I feel less exposed in the role of the performer, as my status is fixed and I am able to relinquish responsibility at the point in which I wash off my bleeding heart and leave my *blonde “bomb”shell* behind.

The attendees were not a live art audience but mostly members of the local community, who had read in the newspaper that a free public performance was taking place in their hometown. Gómez-Peña was sensitive to the non-specialist spectators and the demands that he could place on them, and the company supported participants during the human mural. Furthermore, my expertise as a participant-spectator served to heighten my sensitivity towards the young woman with the bow, as I had an embodied perception of her increasing vulnerability and desire for me to take the lead. What you see in the documentation of our exchange is a series of images where we are holding each other or bound together with rope, see Figure 5.

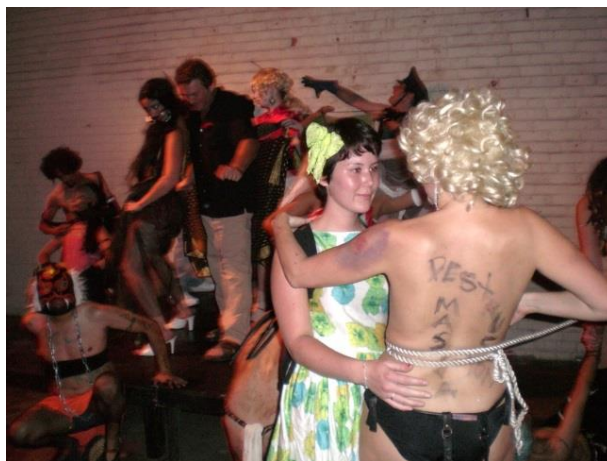


Figure 5: A participant-spectator in the arms of “mass destruction”. Author’s own image.

These images do not depict an emancipated spectator; her physicality appears to be more passive than active. There is no role reversal, as I feel responsible for her in the performance, and the only point in which she lets go of me is when she departs from the human mural. She remains in her original dress throughout the performance, limiting the transformative effect of her participation. In contrast to my “stylised freak”⁴², her lack of costume evidences a disparity in our roles. Yet, it is precisely because of our striking difference – the ordinary in the arms of the extraordinary - that our shared experience is even more stirring, which is conspicuous in the documentation. Moreover, in the photograph where she is leaving the performance, the hand over her mouth suggests that she is trying to come to terms with what she has experienced, see Figure 6. However, I am aware that this reading may be influenced by a tendency to romanticise the encounter.



Figure 6: A participant-spectator post-participation in the human mural. Author's own image.

⁴² The term “freak” stems directly from Gómez-Peña’s writing and relates to his argument that we are installed in what he refers to as “the mainstream bizarre” where radical behaviour, sexual hybridity and otherness are stylised and exoticised for daily entertainment. These “stylised freaks” are parodied and deconstructed in La Pocha Nostra’s practice, as discussed by Gómez-Peña (2005: 52, 63-64, and 249).

It is owing to the documentation that I also recognise that she is wearing a black rucksack throughout the improvisation; the decision not to leave it behind symbolises an unwillingness to lose her previous identity and perhaps audience-ness, or to remain on my side of the border. She is in transit, neither performer nor spectator, but a spectator-tourist somewhere between the two positions.

3.2 Introduction

This chapter will examine the processes and practices that enable and trouble spectators' border crossing within La Pocha Nostra's interactive rituals. The discussion will focus on how participation is fostered, the moment of participation, and what it feels like from both sides of the border and from the position of being indeterminately in-between the two. It is in this chapter that I will analyse my three-way encountering of La Pocha Nostra's performances, by applying the theoretical framework outlined in chapter two and critical concepts emerging from the writing of scholars such as Victor Turner, Richard Schechner, and Rachel Gomme. The chapter will investigate the ways in which these performances correspond to and extend the debates that surround participation.

The analysis will begin with my third encounter, as I examine the way in which the participant-spectator inhabits a dual position both inside and outside of the performance, applying the concepts of Karoline Gritzner and Gareth White. I will refer to this predicament as "the paradox of participation", and outline how it complicates and usefully informs participation. The duality purported by this situation poses a challenge to Laura Cull's notion of "ontological participation" in which there is only a single dimension to experience. This leads me to draw an analogy between a participant-spectator's duality in performance and Gómez-Peña's dual citizenship for Mexico and

the U.S. Reflecting on my own experience as a participant-spectator, I will propose that the duality of “productive participation”⁴³ is, in fact, an interdependent rather than oppositional relationship between the mind and the body. I will also distinguish how audience-ness differs across the related fields of theatre and live art, to suggest that the role of the spectator in live art, and arguably beyond, is evolving to become increasingly mutable. While the paradox of participation presents one of the biggest challenges for the analysis of participation, I propose that it also offers a unique vantage point from which to consider the performance.

Chapter two outlined Claire Bishop’s (2006) analysis of the artistic motivations for making participatory art. However, to understand the growing appetite for these performances, chapter three examines the desires and resistances of spectators towards participation. In addition, I suggest how participatory live art can represent a ‘limit experience’ for some audience members, to use Gritzner’s term (2011: 111). Still, at the same time, the discussion will draw attention to an emerging tier of spectatorship: the expert participant-spectators and their impact on creating productive participation.

A principle concern for this chapter is to undertake a close examination of La Pocha Nostra’s methodology towards participation, with a view to reveal how spectators are encouraged and supported to cross the performance border. I will analyse their use of the terms “extreme performance games” and “interactive rituals” to define their practice; adopting these notions as conceptual frames through which to uncover the close bond between participation, ritual, and performance. Drawing on the processes of

⁴³ “Productive Participation” is a term used by Adam Alston to suggest a type of audience participation which enhances their involvement and demands that they make, do and feel more. See Alston (2016b: 3-11) for a full account.

ritual and rites of passage, as well as the related writing of Erika Fischer-Lichte (2005, 2008), the study will distinguish the strategies and tactics that work towards garnering the audience's "special complicity" (Alston 2013: 129; see also Fried 1968: 127) and a heightened level of attention that enables spectators to have an embodied experience of the performance.

Expanding on the way that participation is generated, the study also explores how the three roles - performing-spectator, watching-spectator, and watching-directing-spectator - function within La Pocha Nostra's work. I propose that acknowledging the interrelationship between these positions and how they influence participation is pivotal to understanding the complex audience dynamic within these works. To this end, I will establish that improvisation, reciprocity and "play" are foundational principles in the role of the performing-spectator, as well as in the creation of "communitas" (see Victor Turner 1982; see also Edith Turner 2005). I recognise that the presence of the watching-spectator is part of the narcissistic appeal of participation. Still, at the same time, I maintain that witnessing the performing-spectators can produce a myriad of emotions for those on the side-lines. Furthermore, the notable separation of those that are 'participation-rich' from those that are 'participation-poor' substantiates David Beech's suggestion that participation creates a new hierarchy of spectatorship (Beech in Walwin 2010: 25). Nonetheless, I will argue that this social structure is challenged in La Pocha Nostra's interactive rituals by the watching-directing-spectators.

In the final part of chapter three, I look at the consequences and potentialities of La Pocha Nostra's performances. This directly relates to my on-going questioning of the established relationship between participation and political empowerment, and the

implied transformative capacity of these encounters. During my analysis, I bring to light the issue of care and ethical responsibility in participation, and the limited consideration given to the ‘cool down’, to use Richard Schechner’s expression (Schechner 1981: 269). I also make a comparison between participatory performance and a one-night stand sexual encounter, as a way of considering the role of intimacy within these shared experiences. This leads to a more detailed examination of intimacy, applying Gomme’s (2015) reflective analysis which draws on the writing of Emmanuel Levinas; and Lisa Register and Tracy Henley’s ‘The Phenomenology of Intimacy’ (1992).

Throughout this chapter, I continue to develop a theoretical framework for analysing participatory live art. I make particular use of Gómez-Peña’s writing, specifically his book *Ethno-Techno* (2005), which provides a theoretical commentary to the practice that features in this study. Moreover, deeper reflection on the three encounters is placed in dialogue with the arguments presented, to offer new insights from both inside and outside of participation.

3.3 The Paradox of Participation

Reflecting on my observation that the young woman with the bow appeared to be in transit between the roles of performer and spectator, I propose that “the paradox of participation” is that as participant-spectators we appear to be on both sides of the performance border at the same time. Gritzner establishes in her article ‘On participation in Art’ (2011) that although participation can offer an exciting experience, it places the spectator in a predicament of occupying two mutually exclusive positions, inside and outside of the performance. Therefore, our own self-awareness of what we are doing during participation means that ‘consciousness is always somewhere else’

(Gritzner 2011: 136), and in realising this conflict we may become even more self-aware. Similarly, White acknowledges the continuing role of participants as audience members, stating that ‘the participant is simultaneously the performer, the one who enacts the performance through choice, the performance that emerges from their own body and the audience as they view it’ (2013: 161). This corresponds with Cull’s suggestion that participation is not divorced from observation, but instead produces a special form of attention that comes from ‘looking in the midst of doing’ (Cull 2011: 86). Indeed, artists rely on participants maintaining a degree of their audience-ness, as it is the special complicity⁴⁴ that they develop as an audience member which informs their improvisation. If we were to forget our audience experience completely, there would be no continuity in the aesthetics of the piece and it may develop into something altogether different. Conversely, if we are too aware of our audience role, we may feel inhibited in our performer role, which may hinder our ability to improvise freely.

Looking back at my own participation in *Ex Centris*, it was the self-awareness, albeit unconscious, of seeing at the same time as doing which informed the way that I operated within the human mural. As the audience of my own performance, I felt a responsibility to maintain the aesthetic and political agenda that I had experienced leading up to my participation. This coincides with Nicholas Ridout’s theorising that there is ‘an imaginary “spectator” within us’ (Ridout 2009: 33), which I will return to in chapter five. Over the duration of the human mural, I found myself employing the same strategy of juxtaposition that I had seen used by *La Pocha Nostra*. The intensity and conspicuousness of my hybrid persona, depicted in Figure 1, attests to the way in which

⁴⁴ The term “special complicity” was coined by Michael Fried in his analysis of the spectatorship of minimal sculpture to describe a sense of responsibility that the artwork extorts from the viewer. See Fried (1968: 127).

I had developed an affinity with their practice. In the periods of stillness, when Gómez-Peña, the audience, and the photographers were viewing the final image, I was able to see myself both *through* and *reflected in* their eyes. Nonetheless, after the event, my embodied experience overwhelmed my ability to critique the performance. While I felt closer to the practice and its ideology, it was at the loss of my critical distance. Reason notes, following Rancière, '[e]ngulfed within the work the audience is no longer able to see the work, no longer able to question its principles' (2015: 274). As I highlighted in chapter one, writing is one way in which an increasing number of academics in the field have attempted to bring together their dual perspective from both sides of the border.

Whereas Cull's notion of ontological participation challenges the possibility of being outside of one's existence (Cull 2011: 82; see also Deleuze 2001: 27), in my experience, this separation was both undeniable and essential to enabling "productive participation". However, I recognise that this assessment may not be true for every participant and as critic Lyn Gardner contends, theatre behaviour 'is a learned behaviour and one that can be quickly unlearned' (2010). As Gómez-Peña has observed, younger audiences already see themselves as 'insiders' (Gómez-Peña 2005: 54). Similarly, Machon considers that the role of spectators within immersive practices has produced an '*evolvment through involvement* of a particular kind of audience' (2013: 73 emphasis original). In this way, and given the proliferation of participatory experiences, a single dimension to the perception of participation may be an evolutionary possibility for newer audiences.

In developing my analysis of the paradox of participation, I wish to draw a parallel between the participant-spectator's partial belonging to both sides of the performance

border and Gómez-Peña's dual citizenship for Mexico and the U.S. Gómez-Peña

explains how:

[w]e exchanged our green card for a gold one, and went from being partial, incomplete citizens in Mexico and the U.S. to becoming full citizens in both countries. Our rationale for applying was that if our two countries were engaged in a seductive rhetoric of "free exchange," it was only logical that all Mexican-Americans should become dual citizens, and vote in both countries ... It was only logical that we should demand to be treated as true partners in the project of imagining a more enlightened future for both countries. (La Pocha Nostra 2003)

If we consider participation's rhetoric of a democratising of art as a kind of "free exchange", one can conclude that if we are to be "true" co-creators in re-imagining our social and political reality we need to experience full citizenship, while not denying an essential duality. One way in which this might be achieved is through greater agency for spectators in the production of the performance, which I will discuss in chapter four. Another course, however, involves extending our window of perception (Cull 2011: 87), not by diminishing binary opposites, but by rethinking the way that we perceive of the two sides in relation to each other. To this end, I want to propose that we see binary relations in participation as interdependent rather than in opposition.

It is at this juncture that I wish to introduce Nora Bateson's term "symmathesy", as outlined in her book *Small Arcs of Larger Circles* (2016). Bateson advises that we need a new word and concept which 'highlights the expression and communication of interdependency and, particularly, mutual learning' within living systems (2016: 168). She argues that the idea of a system as a series of 'parts' goes against living systems that incorporate relational and mutual learning contexts, and 'blinds us to the developing interactions that take place in life' (Ibid., 169). I suggest that participatory performance as an emergent form constitutes a living system, acting as a 'hive of communication between and within its living, interacting "parts"' (Ibid., 168). A

working definition of Bateson's "symmathesy" suggests that it is 'an entity formed over time by contextual mutual learning through interaction' (Ibid). I propose that participatory performance forms a *symmathesy* in which the symbiosis of binaries work together to enable the spectator to make sense of their experience. As Bateson notes: '[t]he ability to perceive paradox, and avoid the impulse to choose a path down one side or the other, is essential for our future interactions with complex systems' (Ibid., 170). Therefore, while the inherent duality created by participation creates a paradoxical situation, we may understand these experiences better if we accept the 'parts' as mutually supportive rather than in conflict.

According to White, participation does not extinguish our role as audience, rather 'when we become audience members we remain audience members' (White 2013: 160). He maintains that even on the occasions where we might "lose" ourselves in participation and forget the "audience-ness" of our experience we will be restored to the role of theatregoer on leaving the event and it is from this perspective that we will reflect on what happened. While I was returned to my audience status after my participation in *Ex Centris*, it is important to emphasise that the audience-ness of a live art spectator is not the same as that of a theatregoer. As Lois Keidan notes, the early adopters of live art in the late 1980s and 1990s were 'audiences looking for risk, looking for new ideas' (cited in Frank and Waugh 2005: 75). Therefore, an expectation to be challenged is part of the makeup of a live art spectator. To this end, they have developed a mobile concept of their role as an audience member. Consistent with live art's resistance to easy definition and the slippage implied by the "live" element of its classification, a live art audience is not confined to a single position. Indeed, their role is comparable to Machon's identification of the transient role of the audience in immersive

practices, wherein they may evolve as ‘audience-spectator-watcher-protagonist-percipient’ (2013: 74). These spectators are also accustomed to being in close proximity to the action, where critical distance can be difficult to maintain. Live art is a ‘difficult art form’, especially because of the way that it challenges orthodoxies of value and artistic traditions (Heathfield in Frank and Waugh 2005: 72-73). In this way, a degree of fluidity regarding interpretation is accepted as part of the territory, with most live art works considered to be “open” to multiple readings and responses.

Most importantly, a defining feature of live art is its capacity to be felt in the stomach and heart, rather than as a form to be looked on. In fact, spectators are often compelled to look away. In this manner, the binaries of looking and knowing, seeing and touching, observation and participation have always been on shaky ground. Accordingly, live art can be seen to actualise Merleau-Ponty’s notion that the ‘visible and tangible belong to the same world’ (Merleau-Ponty 1968 in Fischer-Lichte 2008: 133). A live art spectator anticipates the potential for an embodied response as well as a critical one, with participation merely extending those expectations. In short, a live art spectator does not lose their audience-ness when participating because an experiential dimension is an accepted part of their audience-ness. Consequently, their restored position post-participation is one that anticipates processing their experience from both perspectives of spectator and performer, outsider and insider, with all the complexity that such a position yields.

My analysis of the paradox of participation has shown how the duality of the participant-spectator’s role both complicates perception and holds the performance together. In this way, I have proposed that by adopting Bateson’s term “symmathesy”

and accepting this paradox as mutually supportive, we may gain a better understanding of these complex encounters. In addition, the discussion has highlighted how shifting expectations of the audience in live art towards co-production has meant that our audience-ness must now include the possibility of an embodied experience. Moreover, in our continuing role as audience members, we are given new insights, afforded by the greater proximity from which we encounter the performance from both the inside and the outside.

3.4 Desires and Resistances

Up until now, my analysis has focused on the impulses of the artists that make participatory work and the claims made on behalf of participation. Turning my attention to the spectators, this section will explore their desires and resistances towards participation. Alston maintains that hedonistic and narcissistic desire are two principle drivers towards participation: ‘hedonistic, because the experiences are often pleasurable, with pleasure often sought as an end in itself, as a site of self-indulgence or even eroticism; narcissistic, because the experience is all about you, the participant’ (Alston 2013: 130). Indeed, these desires resonate with my own reasons for accepting the invitation during *Ex Centris*. Firstly, I was consciously aware that co-creating with Gómez-Peña at the Tate Modern, in full view of a public audience, offered a unique opportunity. Secondly, my prior witnessing had readied me for participation, so when called upon by Gómez-Peña I was motivated to share my understanding and extend my encounter. To echo Alston, ‘Attention tends to be turned inwards, towards the experiencing self, accompanied by a persistent reaching towards a maximization of experience, underscoring the potentially indulgent meaningfulness of that “special complicity” of Fried’s’ (2013: 130; see also Fried 1968: 127). Lastly, though

unaccustomed to participation, my previous performer training had taught me that improvisation and performing in general could be a gratifying experience. Still, at the same time, the pressure to be spontaneously creative and a predisposition to stage fright resulted in some hesitation. However, on this occasion, desire outweighed resistance.

It is also worth noting that who we are with during these encounters is a further influencing factor. In the example of *Ex Centris*, I was attending the exhibition with an actor friend and her own volunteering emboldened me to participate. As Dominique Pasquier's empirical research acknowledges, 'people tend to be highly attentive to the reactions of other people in the audience, especially those who accompanied them on the outing' (2015: 226). Conversely, I attended the second encounter performance alone; thus, there was neither the encouragement nor the need for mutual knowledge of the production.

There is a consensus amongst academics in the field that competition with other spectators promotes individualism and works against a feeling of community. Jan Wozniak's article 'The value of being together? Audiences in Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man*' argues that participation can replicate the feeling of competition and anxiety that we experience in modern life (2015: 329). Alston sees competitive behaviour within immersive theatre as "entrepreneurial participation" based on self-made opportunity (Alston 2013: 128). He suggests that those audience members with experience, who actively hunt out participatory encounters, such as the illusive one-to-ones in a Punchdrunk piece, are more likely to reap the rewards (Alston 2013: 133). Alston draws on the work of Harvie (2013: 120-1) to align this approach to a neoliberal ethos that rewards individualism and creates an 'uneven distribution of participatory

opportunity' (Alston 2013: 132-133). Notwithstanding the negative and divisive potential of competitive behaviour in participation, I propose that competition can also be good for participation. It can compel individuals to go beyond their usual limits, to up their game and be more adventurous, creative, and present than their co-participants, or at the least to meet them at their level of performance. In this way, competition between spectators may work to enhance the aesthetics and transformative possibilities of the performance. This is even more evident in a specialist audience, where a degree of competition may already exist amongst the contingent of peers. In contrast, a lack of competition and expertise may limit the participation, as found with the Tucson audience at MOCA, who produced a modest human mural in comparison to the one in *Ex Centris* and *Mapa Corpo 2*.

As a final point on participatory desire, White has suggested that participation itself can function as aesthetic material (2013: 9-10), not only for the artist, but also for the spectator. To this end, as Alston also recognises:

The pleasure of participating is often rooted less in the aesthetic stimulus as it is in the participatory response that becomes its own site of aesthetic appreciation: a site that is both within the spectator and projected outwards through acts of participation, which subsequently become sites of reception. (2013: 130)

In sum, the experience of participation is not merely a consequence of the performance; rather it is fundamental to our reason for participating (Ibid).

To better understand the range of spectator responses to participation, this section examines some of the main resistances and limits to this mode of performance. Spectator-participation as a practice has become increasingly specialised and demanding alongside the escalating ambitions and innovations of artists. For many audience members, participation is a love it or hate it form of spectatorship. Even if you

are more inclined to love it, there may still be times when you do not want to participate. As Gritzner suggests, a resistance to participation can occur because it does not come naturally and requires making an effort (2011: 136). This is especially true of a non-specialist audience, who by extension do not necessarily have any performance related skills or experience.

Gritzner notes that for some audience members of live art, what is expected exceeds what they are willing to give. She refers to this as a 'limit experience' that can threaten, rather than encourage, participation (2011: 111). Instead of activating the spectator, she argues that participation can in fact have a 'freezing' effect:

Participatory art is said to enhance the flow of movement between people, facilitate new exchanges, make encounters possible and even restore social bonds. But art in which participation is truly the focus of attention ... tends to halt the movement of exchange and appears as the opposite of fluid interconnectivity. (Gritzner 2011: 113)

Gómez-Peña openly states that in the final section of La Pocha Nostra's performances they create tableaux vivants with 'the most responsive and audacious audience members' (Gómez-Peña 2005: 84), but what about those that are not responsive or audacious? Echoing Gritzner, if participation goes too far it can bring the spectator's engagement with the work to a standstill. Therefore, rather than engage they step back, turn off, or are deterred from attending in the first place. Consequently, as Gomme observes, 'the genuine trepidation of anxious would-be-audiences ... manage this risk through a variety of conscious and unconscious strategies, only the most obvious of which is to avoid it altogether' (2015: 289). Anna Wilson maintains in her article 'Playing the Game: Authenticity and invitation in Ontroerend Goed's *Audience*' (2015) that the most resistant act of all may be for spectators not to respond at all to the tactics employed to foster participation (2015: 339). In this way, one might consider the non-

performing spectators as actively resistant rather than passively reluctant. In chapter five, I will share the ways in which I consciously avoided being chosen for participation in Gob Squad's performance of *War and Peace* (2016), drawing on Erving Goffman's 1959 seminal text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

A further resistance to participation, recognised by Alexander Garcia Düttmann in conversation with Karoline Gritzner (2011), is the contradiction of wishing to participate at the same time as wanting 'to be left alone'. He notes that '[w]e don't want to be alone, we want to be with others so that we can escape our own stupidity, and yet for that very reason, because we want to escape our stupidity, we also want to be left alone and not be with others' (Düttmann 2011: 137). Reflecting on my own experiences, whereas the impulse to participate - 'to be with others' - in *Ex Centris* had overwhelmed my fear of stupidity, in *Mapa Corpo 2* I felt less persuaded to participate. I was not sure that I had anything to gain a second time around, and I was wary of the mixed feelings that had followed my introduction to participation, discussed later in the chapter. Aside from these resistances and limits to participation, it would be fair to say that many spectators of live art are drawn to the practice because it challenges boundaries and notions of acceptability. Moreover, as the popularity of participatory performance has grown, the gap between the artist as a professional and the participant-spectator as an amateur has closed.

3.5 Expert Participant-Spectators

This part of the discussion will focus on how the upsurge in participation has given rise to a level of proficiency in participatory spectatorship: the expert participant-spectator. Increasingly, expert participant-spectators are taking a key role in realising the intended

aesthetic of participation. The artist may even call upon them if the interaction is in need of artistic intervention. These individuals have developed the knowledge of participation and the requisite techniques to improvise and reciprocate at will. However, returning to Pasquier's citing of Bourdieu, discussed in chapter two, the expert participants' ability to maintain a particular aesthetic may put some audience members off participating; for fear that, they may not be able to perform at the same level (Bourdieu 1984 in Pasquier 2015: 23).

As my experiences of La Pocha Nostra's performances testify, the context and specific audience for these works clearly influences the way that audience participation develops. *Ex Centris* was exhibited as part of the *Live Culture* event at the Tate Modern, organised by the London based organisation LADA. As a result, the audience included the significant live art community affiliated to and supported by LADA, several of which were also performing at the event. When Gómez-Peña tells us that audience members see themselves as 'insiders', in some instances they ARE 'insiders'. For example, the artist Marisa Carnesky is captured on camera in the *Live Culture* film (2003), as a spectator who agrees to 'show her breasts' and join the human mural. In watching the film, I am struck by Gómez-Peña's whispered conversation with Carnesky before she enters the performance:

Gómez-Peña: How comfortable do you feel with your body?

Carnesky: Yes, very comfortable.

Gómez-Peña: Can you show your breasts?

Carnesky: Yeah.

Gómez-Peña: Okay you can come ... (the end of the sentence is inaudible, but it is a clear invitation to participate)

Carnesky removes her upper body garments at the side of the raised platform, and is led up the steps by Gómez-Peña to the human mural. He then applies traditional headwear and club-esque sunglasses to Carnesky, and she is left to assume her own pose.

Gómez-Peña's questioning of Carnesky suggests that he is casting for a specific type of performer within the diorama, with the showing of breasts as potential criteria. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as an artist exploiting a spectator. On the other hand, noting the context and the specialist audience in attendance, one might accept that he is merely utilising the talent of his spectators. It is important to mention that I did not witness the same level of exposure requested from the non-specialist audience at MOCA, Tucson. While Gómez-Peña's questioning indicates that he did not know Carnesky's artist background,⁴⁵ there are a number of signs that infer the expertness of participant-spectators. These include standing in close proximity to the site of participation; attempting to meet the gaze of the artist; displaying an open body language; surveying all that is taking place; carrying extra supplies (food, clothes, even slippers - *512 Hours*) to survive the full experience; and most obviously, greeting the artist - before helping the participation along. One of the most infamous examples of an expert participant-spectator is captured when Ulay⁴⁶ sits across the table from Marina Abramović in *The Artist is Present* (2010) at New York's Museum of Modern Art. The video of the couple, reunited after twenty-five years, received over fourteen million views on YouTube.

Despite my frequent reluctance to participate, I must concede that I may now belong to this category of spectators. This is owing to the experience and knowledge gained of the field, but most significantly the time that I spent on the other side of the border as a

⁴⁵ Marisa Carnesky is a performance artist who has been staging shows for over 20 years. She is most famous for her long-running piece *Carnesky's Ghost Train* (2004), an alternative theme park ride which occupied a space on Blackpool's Golden Mile until 2014.

⁴⁶ Ulay and Marina Abramović were long-term partners in art and love. They famously created a series of relational art pieces together during the period of 1976-1988.

collaborator with La Pocha Nostra. It was here that I learnt how to differentiate between the spectators that are willing to co-create and those that want to be left alone, informing my own tactics in the situation of participation. For instance, while attending Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man* (2013) my expertness was rewarded with a much-coveted one-to-one encounter, as I was pulled out of the crowd and taken into a static caravan, leaving my female companion behind. Her attempt to follow me was thwarted when the caravan door was firmly closed, barring her entry to both the dwelling and a more intimate experience. As Beech has noted, following Rancière, rather than being inclusive, audience participation can also be socially divisive (Beech in Walwin 2010: 25). While participation may offer new and exciting opportunities for spectatorship, at the same time it carries its own limitations.

3.6 La Pocha Nostra's Emancipated Spectator

In chapter two, I signalled that my reading of emancipating spectators in participatory live art would move on from Rancière's concept of "the emancipated spectator". To this end, the focus of this discussion will be how emancipating spectators functions within La Pocha Nostra's work and the way that this is underpinned by the three main motivations identified by Bishop: activation, authorship and community (Bishop 2006a: 12). I have already outlined how a live art spectator is not emancipated in the same way as a conventional theatregoer because they have always been afforded greater physical and interpretive freedom. Therefore, instead of being released from a seat in a darkened auditorium, an emancipated spectator in live art is more concerned with the way that they are given a more active role in the production process.

La Pocha Nostra's "ethno-techno" art epitomises the two interpretations of 'new theatre' identified by Rancière (2007: 272), confronting the audience with a strange spectacle and then inviting them to participate in the theatrical action. It also meets with Machon's definition of (syn)aesthetic practice (2009: 26), through the transgressive and interdisciplinary form and content; embracing of hybridity in the striking dioramas; and embodied use of critical theory. As Gómez-Peña reflects:

Over the past years, perhaps our most significant contribution to the field has been in our hybrid realm of performance/installation. We create interactive "living museums" that parody various colonial practices of representation. ... We "exhibit" our highly decorated bodies sometimes as "specimens" from an endangered tribe or "border saints" from a persecuted religion. We surrender our will to the audience and assume composite identities dictated by the fears and desires of museum visitors and Internet users. (2005: 81)

In my account of *Mapa Corpo 2*, I described how Roberto Sifuentes was offered as the centrepiece for a participatory response to the future of civilisation, see Figure 3.

However, these acts of surrender are warm ups for the main event when La Pocha Nostra relinquish their stage to the audience, discussed later in the chapter. As Gómez-Peña puts it: 'We invite them to cocreate the piece and to participate in our "extreme performance games" riddled with postcolonial implications. These games are integral aspects of our work' (Ibid., 80). The connection between participation and political empowerment within the theatre, noted by Freshwater (2009: 3), is supported in the activist art of La Pocha Nostra. As Gómez-Peña states: 'Challenging the audience to choose whether or not to participate in this or that performance game means it becomes necessary for them to exercise their civic muscles and political intelligence' (2005: 83). The invitation to co-create is a device to encourage activation, and nowhere is this activation more prominent than during the human mural.

As an extreme performance game the human mural embodies the dogma that emancipated spectators will be empowered to create alternative social and political relations. Gómez-Peña states:

My job may be to open up a temporary utopian/dystopian space, a “de-militarized zone” in which meaningful “radical” behavior and progressive thought are allowed to take place, even if only for the duration of the performance. In this imaginary zone, both artist and audience members are given permission to assume multiple and ever changing positionalities and identities. In this border zone, the distance between “us” and “them,” self and other, art and life, becomes blurry and unspecific. (2005: 24).

The notion of a “de-militarized zone” converges with Fisher’s imagining of a radical democratic theatre that opens up a ‘space of speech’ (Fisher 2011: 25). Additionally, the deliberate collapse of binaries realises Fischer-Lichte’s theory, outlined in chapter two, that participation can enable human beings to ‘enter into a new relationship with themselves and the world’ which is not ‘determined by an “either/or” situation but by an “as well as”’ (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 204; see also 2008: 207). The multiplicity of roles made available to spectators also has much in common with Machon’s perception of the transient role of the spectator within immersive practices (2013: 74). Naturally, the way in which La Pocha Nostra’s practice converses with the arguments that surround participation is symptomatic of Gómez-Peña’s knowing use of theory to inform their work. This was evident during the residency programme that I undertook with the company, which included scholars as well as artists.

The importance of sharing authorship and creating a community are paramount in La Pocha Nostra’s performances, exemplified by Gómez-Peña imploring spectators to co-create with him. Indeed, learning to surrender authorial control underpins much of their radical performance pedagogy. Gómez-Peña explains how ‘[i]t is important to begin questioning the sacred notion of authorship and to establish collaborative and

multicentric relationships with our partners in crime' (2005: 114). The human mural serves to create a community of co-subjects, as performing-spectators, watching-directing-spectators and Gómez-Peña work together to produce the final image. This shared authorship with spectators enables the hierarchy of artist over spectator to diminish for the duration of the exercise. However, as my analysis will establish, the separation of those doing from those looking can produce a new hierarchy amongst spectators. Furthermore, while spectators may be invited to co-create the performance, authorship is eventually returned to Gómez-Peña in his confirmation of the final image.

3.7 Interactive Rituals

La Pocha Nostra's approach to emancipating spectators is framed by their use of the term "interactive rituals" to define their work, suggestive of the processes and transformative capacity foundational to their methodology. Exploring the lexicon of "interactive rituals" reveals how these works have emerged as a response to a perceived social crisis within contemporary culture. In chapter two, I referenced Bishop to distinguish that "interactivity" concerns the involvement of the spectator physically rather than socially, especially in relation to technology-based experiences where it is most prevalent. However, the term "interactive" as a prefix to the term "rituals" infers a social dimension to the practice, as well as a direct reference to La Pocha Nostra's use of technology within their total environments. More importantly, this choice of language acknowledges that these ritual performances are taking place at a time when networking technologies have transformed communication, and virtuality is a part of our everyday reality (Castells, 2010: xvii). As Gómez-Peña states:

The illusion of interactivity and citizen participation has definitely changed the relationship between live art and its audience. Audiences are increasingly having a harder time just sitting and passively watching a performance, especially

younger audiences. They've been trained by TV, SuperNintendo, video games, and the Internet to "interact" and be part of it all (2005: 54).

Likewise, Gardner observes that audiences 'now increasingly expect to get the opportunity to play, genuinely interact, curate their own experience of the work and feel that their presence really does make a difference' (Gardner, 2010). This is particularly poignant in the context of political unrest where 'interactivity and citizen participation' for many people feels like an 'illusion'. As Gómez-Peña reminds us, '[o]ur unprecedented emptiness and acute social crises cannot be "healed" by institutionalized religion', hence, it is in '[a] participatory ritual performance through which we get to experience (or rather to believe we are experiencing) an intensified sense of ourselves and of the many worlds we have lost for good' (Gómez-Peña, 2005: 62).

Despite the inherent bond between participation, ritual and performance, there has been little analysis of participatory practices through the lens of ritual. Fischer- Lichte's 2005 book *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* determines that theatre is inherently participatory, citing Max Hermann's proposal that it is 'a social game – played by all for all. A game in which everyone is a player – participants and spectators' (Hermann 1920 in Fischer- Lichte 2005: 23). It is significant that Gómez-Peña also refers to their interactive rituals as "extreme performance games", which coincides with his view that younger audiences are being 'trained' by video games. One of the unifying features of participation, ritual and performance is the way in which they serve to bring people together in a shared experience. A shared experience has long since been in the fabric of what constitutes performance, but typically refers to the collective encountering of the audience. In participatory performance, this sharing extends beyond those in the audience, to the exchange that takes place between the artist

and the participant-spectator. Furthermore, the experience is one that is embodied rather than perceived from a more distant perspective.

Turner's statement that ritual is 'complex and many-layered' can easily be applied to participatory performance, given the various debates and paradoxical perspectives that characterise this practice (Turner 1982: 82). Yet, according to White there is a difficulty in applying ritual concepts arising from anthropology to a theatrical situation because they 'will not have the weight and consequence' and 'the participants will probably not be permanently transformed by the experience either in their own minds or in the eyes of society' (White 2013: 140; see also Fischer-Lichte 2008: 175-176). Looking back on my participation in *Ex Centris* (2003), although I would not go as far as to say that I was forever transformed by the experience, it was this encounter that led to my eventual journey to Arizona. To this end, my symbolic border crossing in the fictional space of *Ex Centris* brought me closer to the very "real" borderline that permeates all of Gómez-Peña's art. In turn, La Pocha Nostra's radical performance methodology and the daily news stories that infiltrated our rehearsals of Mexicans that had been shot crossing the state line, gave the politics of border crossing an unforgettable immediacy, which is visible in my *blonde- "bomb" shell* persona (see Figures 4 and 5). This demonstrates how the aesthetic of La Pocha Nostra's practice is permeated with the social, becoming a 'metacommentary on the major social dramas of its social context' (Schechner and Appel 1990: 15). Therefore, corresponding to Turner's concept of "social drama", which he suggests arise out of a perceived crisis within the social system. Turner proposes that there are facets of social drama that can be seen as forms of conflict-resolution that aim to address the 'disharmonic' processes in the social fabric (Turner 1986: 74). This quality is actualised in the human mural, as a theatrical strategy that

attempts to resolve social inequality by offering a different reality, which is consolidated in the sought-after final image.

Another angle on this debate, however, arises from Bishop's article 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents' (2006b), which reflects on participation's preoccupation with social relations and a shared construction of meaning as a defining feature and driving force in its popularity. She follows Rancière to suggest that 'the aesthetic doesn't need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change because it already inherently contains this ameliorative process' (2006b: 183). Rancière's argument establishes that the 'aesthetic regime of art', as understood in the West, is founded on the contradiction between art's autonomy and heteronomy or rather its blurring of art and life (Bishop 2006b: 183). Bishop maintains that to unravel or ignore this complex bond is to miss the point of art, as the aesthetic is 'the productive contradiction of art's relationship to social change, characterized by that tension between faith in art's autonomy and belief in art as inextricably bound to the promise of a better world to come' (Bishop 2006b 185). This paradoxical relationship between autonomy and heteronomy in art is symbolised in both the form and content of *La Pocha Nostra's* human mural. Firstly, the form displays the sovereignty of individuals' improvised decisions, at the same time their actions are informed by a special complicity with the aesthetic, and the suggestions of Gómez-Peña and the watching-directing-spectators. Secondly, the content presents an unorthodox utopia that is free of outside constraints, while simultaneously proposing a 'better world' through a kind of 'reverse anthropology', where the dominant culture exchanges places with the margins (Gómez-Peña 2005: 246).

Drawing on queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's writing, the human mural is foundationally political, as it enables us to catch sight of possible worlds 'not-yet-conscious'; thus, revealing the 'anticipatory illumination of art' (Muñoz 2009: 3). It follows the belief that opening up new ways of knowing is essential if we are to bring about political change (Ibid., 29). This meets with the premise that underlines La Pocha Nostra's practice that '[i]f we learn to cross borders on stage, we may learn how to do so in larger social spheres' (Gómez-Peña 2005: 78-79). However, the discussion on intimacy, towards the end of the chapter, proposes that the real transformative capacity of these experiences lies in the way in which they open up new ways of knowing the self. Overall, the interactive rituals of La Pocha Nostra are indicative of an affinity between ritual, performance, and participation, and serve to reinforce the bond between the aesthetic, social and political in art.

3.8 The Rules of the Game

Wilson maintains that 'every participant is playing the game set out by the company by simply entering the theatre space' (2015: 338). Expanding on the ways in which La Pocha Nostra's use of participation meets with features of ritual, I will analyse how their 'game instructions' and 'staging strategies' in participation typically work towards establishing the three processes of *role reversal*, the *creation of a community*, and mutual physical *contact* (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 40 emphasis original). Fischer-Lichte resolves that:

[i]t is the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators constitutive of performance which allows it to come into being. ... The spectators are regarded as co-players, as participants. It is they who also contribute to the creation of a performance by participating in the game, i.e. by their physical presence, their perception, their responses. ... The rules according to which it brought forth can be regarded as rules of a game which are negotiated by all participants ... (Fischer-Lichte, 2005: 23)

I propose that the rules of La Pocha Nostra's extreme performance games are what make their interactive rituals so distinctive. In addition, these rules set out the parameters for "*an aesthetic of risk*" (Hans Lehmann 2006: 186-187 emphasis original), replacing the safeguard that was once provided by the distance between the audience and the performer with a structure that delineates the boundaries for the performance.

While rules are instrumental in offering a scaffold for participation, nonetheless, the way in which we act within that framework allows unparalleled understandings and implications to emerge (Turner 1982: 79). Present in all forms of ritual and performance, rules suggest a code of behaviour for participants that will enable the event to continue in a particular way. Theatre-going is entrenched with rules: from choosing a specific seat where you will be placed for the duration of the event, to making sure that your mobile phones are switched off before the production begins. When we commit to purchasing a ticket for a performance, we enter into a visible contract with the venue and the practitioner. This may include written guidelines given as part of the ticket transaction, such as the right to refuse late entry; or instructions given pre-performance, which may be communicated through written or spoken text; or recognisable signals offered during the performance, for example when the curtain closes and the theatre lights are turned on to indicate an interval in proceedings. Yet, there are also implicit codes of behaviour, which have more to do with tradition and cultural convention than explicit rules. Indeed, these play a vital role in upholding the shape of the performance and coercing us into being a "good" spectator.

In La Pocha Nostra's practice, it is evident that both explicit and implicit instructions prime the spectator for participation and suggest the limit of their involvement; though

not to the exclusion of spontaneity and transgression. At first glance, like most live art works, the rules appear more relaxed than found in conventional theatre. For instance, spectators are often encouraged in durational performances to come and go at will. However, a deeper analysis reveals that in actuality the rules are far more demanding than the behaviour traditionally expected of a spectator and can include an ability to improvise; to establish a high degree of attention that closes off self-consciousness; to remove your clothes; and to adopt a fictional “stylised freak” persona. Reflecting on my three encounters, the participants - myself included, did ‘dutifully [perform] as instructed, when instructed’ (Harvie 2013: 43). Nonetheless, the human mural’s improvisatory form and the spontaneous instructions offered by the watching-directing-spectators enable both parties to transgress the performance framework, albeit under the watchful eye of Gómez-Peña. One must also allow that part of the appeal of La Pocha Nostra’s practice, following Zerihan (2009: 5), is the opportunity to adopt the superfreak identities and radical behaviours that are encouraged within the structure provided. As a result, the rules are there to emancipate the spectators from their everyday selves, if not from the performance itself.

The most striking form of game instruction comes directly from Gómez-Peña as he initiates the human mural. Appealing for spectators to co-create with him, the artist’s charismatic stage presence conveys this request more as a command than a question. This is reinforced by the way that he repeats the plea until enough participants have accepted the invitation. While I suggest that the invitation comes out of a genuine desire to democratise the process by sharing authorial control with the audience, it is not an invitation that the spectator can easily refuse. Resulting from Gómez-Peña’s verbal request, we see the emergence of the role reversal of performer and spectator. On entry

to the performance space, the spectator's role is reframed, which in turn re-frames the role of the artist. While the performing-spectators become engaged in a process of improvisation and reciprocity, Gómez-Peña becomes their audience. Echoing Fischer-Lichte, the aim of this tactic is not simply to show participant-spectators a display of role reversal, but for them to physically experience this change (2008: 40). That said neither of their original roles is entirely extinguished, with the participants unable to fully lose their audience-ness, and Gómez-Peña's exaggerated use of costuming and exuberant persona marking his behaviour as a performance. Furthermore, Gómez-Peña's directorial role in his management of the live and participating audience ensures that he never surrenders his role completely to the spectators.

The improvisation is partly predestined through further verbal instructions that utilise participants' special complicity and steer them towards a particular aesthetic. This was illustrated by the way that both Carnesky and I realised *La Pocha Nostra's* signature style of bare chested women, wearing indigenous clothing and armed either with a weapon or at the very least a look of defiance. Once the human mural is underway, more instructions follow, but this time in the form of suggestions offered by the watching-directing-spectators, incited by Gómez-Peña. These directions can be themes that act as a stimulus for the diorama, or may offer an attempt to complicate or enhance the image; cries of "more tension" and "more violence" seem to be popular comments. This tactic invites greater co-authorship in the images presented, and is consistent with the notion that the audience's presence matters. It also provides a mechanism for involving the less adventurous spectators, who did not wish to cross the border into the performance but still want to actively engage in the work. This is not to say that an observational role within the human mural is passive, as the shared authorship of

performing-spectators, watching-directing-spectators and Gómez-Peña safeguards a spontaneous and uncertain trajectory for the diorama, which makes translating the images a challenging undertaking for those watching.

Yet, while the development of the human mural is an unpredictable process consistent with a feminised style wherein '*form is never complete*' (Irigaray, 1999 [1991]: 55; emphasis original, in Machon 2009: 43), it is contradicted by the emphasis on reaching a final image. This fixing of the form is reinforced through subsequent documentation, for example, my participation in the final image during *Ex Centris* appears in two book publications, and was captured in the *Live Culture* film of the event, which has now made its way to Vimeo. The lesson learnt: what happens in participatory performance does not necessarily stay in participatory performance.

It is not just verbal instructions that shape the human mural, but also the selection of props and costumes available, which impose a particular aesthetic. These items are carefully selected by La Pocha Nostra, loaded with symbolic and political implications that converge with themes such as "Hollywood gone-wrong" or "a postcard to the Pope" (Gómez-Peña 2005: 122). Spectators will witness variations on these types of themes in the dioramas that precede the human mural, setting the agenda for participation. The props and costumes are part of the framework set out by La Pocha Nostra to allow spectators to immerse themselves in the fictional characters that dwell within the 'imaginary zone'. As Sophie Nield considers in her 2008 article 'The Rise and Fall of the Character called Spectator':

Without the protective apparatus of characterisation, rehearsal, fictive otherness, perhaps we risk staring into the black hole of the theatre itself, mute, stage-affrighted, awakening to the actor's nightmare of being on the stage and not knowing the play. (2008: 535)

Spectators enter unknown territory when they join a live human mural because it arises out of the unpredictable suggestions from the watching-directing-spectators. Therefore, their ‘super freak’ personae offer a form of refuge within *an aesthetic of risk*.

The props and costumes used in the human mural are often recycled from previous performances, as Gómez-Peña explains: ‘the more we use our performance “artifacts” the more “charged” and powerful they become. Recycling is our main *modus operandi*’ (2005: 22). As a result of this process, each human mural is imprinted with the memories of previous encounters, offering a continuation of those experiences. More importantly, this serves as a point of recognition for previous participants, enabling them to revisit their own experience through the experience of another.

3.9 The Space for Participation

Building on the game instructions that set out the framework for participation, this section will elaborate on the influence of spatial concerns and ‘staging strategies’. Let us begin by examining how the performance spaces themselves are inscribed with rules, expectations and conventions. The performance space for *Ex Centris*, a white cube gallery at the Tate Modern, contains an innate ideology that is famously traced by Brian O'Doherty in his book *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1999). He states:

A gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. ... The art is free, as the saying used to go, “to take on its own life.” ... Indeed the presence of that odd piece of furniture, your own body, seems superfluous, an intrusion. The space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space-occupying bodies are not ... (1999: 15)

Adopting this line of thought, closed off from the outside world the gallery gave me dispensation to act in ways that were beyond my ordinary behaviour. To this end, the space acted as an agent towards *an aesthetic of risk* and the extreme scenes of participation that would emerge. Additionally, gallery going typically encourages submissive complicity, as viewers dutifully direct their gaze from one work of art to the next. Therefore, although separated from my responsibilities outside of the gallery, I felt an obligation to accept the invitation to participate. Paradoxically, what was invited departed from the normative gallery going convention of welcoming ‘eyes and minds’, to embracing my whole body.

Comparatively, the warehouse space for my third encounter was a very different kind of environment, far less explicitly or implicitly governed. Owned by MOCA, Tucson, it was a messy space that offered a labyrinth of different rooms, with neglected junk lying around the place. This created a veritable playground for the collaborating artists working with La Pocha Nostra, as we had a myriad of spatial possibilities and artefacts to enhance and complicate our performance material. The possibilities that the space afforded the makers was also replicated in the possibilities that it offered spectators, particularly as it was impossible to distinguish what was part of the performance and what just happened to be there. It was largely void of the usual gallery infrastructures, and the audience were neither gallerygoers nor theatregoers. Instead, the local community had been mobilised by the press coverage and free admission. Hence, the warehouse was free from institutional constraints and an abundance of learnt behaviour, which created a more “open” space. This contributed to spectators’ immersion within the total environment, along with the use of theatrical lighting and a DJ.

The presence of a DJ, dark cavernous spaces, and the musical descent into drum and bass are indicative of the way in which La Pocha Nostra's performance/installations parallel rave and club culture. Indeed, they directly reference these movements in their use of the theme "An apocalyptic rave" and in the moniker of "cool" sunglasses (a known fashion accessory for clubbers) that permeate their images. As an aside, I propose that there are numerous similarities between the ethos, desires, experiences and consequences present in rave and club culture, and those cultivated by immersive and participatory performances. It is worth noting that companies such as Punchdrunk and Gob Squad are part of the 1990s and early 2000s clubbing generation. However, the rise of participatory performance is in contrast to the demise of clubbing. Importantly, the decline of superclubs in the UK, is largely a consequence of their super-corporate absorption into the experience economy, and serves as a warning of how commercialism can elevate and destroy a subculture. In the next chapter, I will look at how participatory performance functions as part of the experience economy.

Synonymous with a clubbing experience, the Tucson spectators roamed freely around the warehouse, coming and going as they pleased for around three hours. In doing so, they appeared to be discovering the rules as they went along. In particular, I recall a moment when a female spectator was testing the boundaries of how close she could come to me by standing directly in front of the 'CAUTION' tape that sealed off the area where I was performing. Each time I approached the tape she searched for my eyes and moved nearer. While the word 'caution' advised the spectator to stay back, she seemed to revel in the idea that the boundary could be pushed (literally). Reflecting on the performance, I was attracted to the space precisely because it was off limits to the roaming audience. The visible boundary would preserve the images that I wanted to

present and enable my performance to continue without outside interference. To this end, the spectators' emancipation had resulted in my incarceration. However, rather than feeling oppressed by the ardent spectator, I felt empowered. The close proximity of her gaze and attention was palpable and served to heighten my own presence. I will expand on the manifestation of co-presence in chapter four. Our encounter ended when I lowered my body under the tape to escape the confined space, and disappeared down a passageway. In this moment, it was apparent that our relationship to the boundary (tape) that separated us was not equal. In following an unwritten code of conduct, the division had prevented her entry, whereas I was able to traverse it at will. In this way, admittance to participate in the performance or lack thereof comes from a mixture of audience complicity and artist discretion. While extreme performance games may grant more freedom than in a traditional performance context, it is clear that performers and spectators do not play by the same rules.

What has emerged from an anthropological perspective in relation to participation is that there is a spatial dimension that is fundamental to spectators' separation from their previous reality and potential transformation. This process converges with the three phases of ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960): rites of separation from a social role or situation; threshold or liminal rites enacted in the transitional space between states; and rites of reincorporation into an established order. As White notes, in "rites of passage" and in "liminality" there is a 'set of procedures that use sequences of frames that mark off times and places as "special", and mark the people who will inhabit them as special too, leading to behaviour that belongs in this time and place and nowhere else' (2013: 138). For La Pocha Nostra this "special" time and place is their 'favourite part of the performance' - the human mural (Gómez-Peña

2005: 84). Its framing as a “special” or “liminal” place is part of its appeal, it denotes that those participants inside the mural are “special”, and gives them licence to behave in ways that are outside of their everyday self.

However, to gain entry to this special place, the participant must move from one spatial realm to another, as Turner explains:

The passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another. This may take the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject’s pre-ritual or preliminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or postliminal status. (Turner 1982: 25)

Movement is fostered through the promenade staging of La Pocha Nostra’s performances. Spectators are encouraged to roam around the ‘living museum’, especially during the first hour, to view the dioramas on their own terms. Therefore, even before the human mural, spectators are unshackled from a physically inactive position, such as that found in a darkened theatre auditorium. The autonomy to wander around and take control of their experience prepares them to make the journey towards participation and to assume an authorial position as a co-creator. Physically warmed up, they are much more inclined to volunteer than if they had been rooted to a seat. Still, at the same time, the spectators’ nomadism also creates a decentring process that mirrors the notion of participation as a form in flux, and reflects Gómez-Peña’s lived border crossing. The term “nomad” might also be exchanged for the term “tourist”. I am reminded of the young woman with her rucksack from my third encounter, embodying the identity of the spectator-tourist on a visit to the “performative world”.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The expression “performative world” is employed by Schechner in his article ‘Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed’ (1981 in Auslander 2003: 270).

The spectators' nomadic existence means that they have no set place to call their own, particularly as there are transitory performers who are wandering about amongst them. Gómez-Peña is the original nomad and possesses an almost shamanic quality as he channels the energy of the performance and directs the action from the floor when needed. His spontaneous direction was something that I experienced first-hand in my own transient persona during the MOCA performance, typically communicated through a whispered request to "activate" a particular space. This approach to directing is critical to the way in which the live and participating audience is effectively managed in La Pocha Nostra's performances.

The human mural is the one place where spectators can experience a sense of belonging for a given time, usually initiated by Gómez-Peña in the last 30-minutes of the three to four hour duration, by which point the atmosphere is much more intense and interactive, driven by the throbbing sound of drum and bass. This final participatory section provides a striking undoing of the distinction between performance space and audience space. The special place for the human mural is often a staged area, but it can also take the form of an ephemeral stage as delineated by Gómez-Peña. As White describes it, '[p]articipation is a bodily activity, in which the location of the body and its relationship to the organisation of space is fundamental, and the experience of audience participation is an experience of changes in spatiality' (White 2013: 167). Where possible, La Pocha Nostra galvanise one of the raised platforms to display the human mural, drawing attention to spectators' border crossing and role reversal. Nonetheless, this arguably implies a new social structure between spectators, as the 'participation-poor' spectators watching from the ground are obliged to look up at their 'participation-rich' counterparts. Following Reason, this literal staging of participation is consistent

with the way that ‘participatory practices privilege interaction, doing, engagement, over the “detached opticality” that has become synonymous with traditional audience/spectator relationships’ (2015: 273).

Fischer-Lichte’s reading of Van Gennep’s rites of passage establishes that traversing the performance and audience divide constitutes a transformative process. She states:

While in the separation phase a boundary is crossed which closes the former everyday life from the particular event that is to take place and the usual social milieu from others, in the integration phase, a new boundary is drawn. The threshold and transformation phase, in its turn, allows for most diverse kinds of transgression, and may even be experienced as a total dissolution of all boundaries. It is the dangerous phase, between the old and the new state, the phase in which the transformation that should take place may fail. (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 37)

Applying these stages to the human mural, once a spectator has accepted the invitation to participate they enter the ‘separation phase’, actualised by moving into the designated performance area. On entering the ‘integration phase’, the participant draws up fresh boundaries; as we have seen this may come in the form of a verbal negotiation or their choice of costume and props. The ‘threshold and transformation phase’ occurs when the participant is fully integrated into the improvisation and they have surrendered their will to the unfolding diorama. This can result in a loss of inhibitions; hence, the striking appearance of the emergent images. Conversely, in this ‘dangerous phase’ there is the possibility that the participant may be unable or unwilling to accept their new role as a performer. As Schechner considers:

A successful performance is one where both the levels of skill (preparers) and understanding (partakers) are high and equal. If the partaker expects more than the preparer can deliver, the performance is inadequate; if the preparer does more than the partaker can savor, the performance is wasted. Low skill matched by low understanding is preferable to an imbalance. (1981: 281)

In the improvisation with the young woman with the bow, my embodied awareness that she was a nonspecialist spectator led me to set the level of improvisation to meet the level of her understanding. Therefore, despite the fact that she looked to me to take the lead, as noted earlier, I was able to maintain some equality between our two roles by ensuring that I did not demand more than she was willing to give.

3.10 Fostering Participation

As I have outlined, there are a number of strategies at work to encourage compliance within La Pocha Nostra's work. My interest in this section is to analyse how La Pocha Nostra foster a special complicity and a heightened level of attention from their audience that anticipates participation. Alston has argued that participation 'is in many ways extorted from the audience, demanding 'a "special complicity" with an aesthetic situation' (Alston 2013: 129; see also Fried 1968: 127). This is consistent with the view that spectators are frequently invited into a pre-determined role, noted in chapter two (see Beech in Walwin 2010: 25; Harvie 2013: 43; Reason 2015: 274). Adopting Fried's analysis of spectatorship of minimal sculpture to the situation of immersive practice, Alston suggests that a special complicity is cultivated by both the environment and the presence of 'a thinking, moving and potentially speaking actor' who typically makes 'an ambiguous demand to do something, complete with that demand's affective capacity' (Alston 2013: 130; see also Nield 2008: 535). As we saw in chapter two, Rancière has made a similar criticism concerning the ambiguity with which practitioners approach participation (Rancière 2007: 277). However, as I have discussed, Gómez-Peña's impassioned invitation to spectators is underlined by a clear agenda to activate their social and political conscience.

Looking at the way that a special complicity is fostered, a cocktail of technology and striking imagery create a *mise en scène* that primes the spectator for participation in La Pocha Nostra's practice. As Gómez-Peña describes:

The audience steps into a "total" environment. Our ethnocyborg personae are displayed on platforms of varying heights and sizes for three to four hours a night, sometimes over a three-day period. Live and prerecorded music, multiple video projections and slides, fog, cinematic lighting, embalmed animals, old-fashioned medical figurines and "ethnokitsch" design motifs all help to enhance our "ethno-techno" and "robo-baroque" esthetic and create a "heightened state" for the spectator/participant. (2005: 81)

The creation of a heightened state corresponds with White's reading of participatory performance through the frame of ritual, specifically the way in which states of mind and body are produced, to play a part in the manipulation of participants and in the aesthetics of participation (2013: 114). Gómez-Peña proposes that "[t]his heightened awareness allows spectators to look at and accept images they would usually reject as impossible, distasteful, or unrealistic. Later on, the audience will recall them and will have to deal with their own memories in the "cold light of day" (2005: 85). As I have already implied, the presence of Gómez-Peña is an influencing factor towards determining the audience's special complicity. This results from the nuances of his performance training and his eye-catching use of costuming, particularly the way in which he employs gender and ethnic bending in his attire. These elements combine to ensure that he has full command of the "live" and participating audience. Chapter four will open out discussions on how stage presence is constructed.

Expanding on the way that La Pocha Nostra manage their spectators, Fischer-Lichte notes that in the absence of a logical plot or well-developed characters, the audience's attention must restructure itself around different factors including the level of intensity of the appearance, deviation, surprise, or conspicuousness (2008: 165 citing Seitter

2002: 171-82). Whereas these attributes are characteristic of live art practice, they are especially potent in the work of La Pocha Nostra, therefore, creating a performance that demands ‘a state of wakefulness’ (Fenemore 2011: 43) and where the audience is brought into view. For Fischer-Lichte, the level of ‘intensity of the appearance’ emerges from the performer’s ability to transmit energy to the spectators. La Pocha Nostra’s radical pedagogy devotes a considerable amount of time to the process of fostering energy transmission between bodies; thus, all of their performers, not just Gómez-Peña, demonstrate a strong concept of presence. Fischer-Lichte suggests that:

By setting free forces in themselves and the spectators, the [performer] generates a shared energy circulation in the space that can be physically sensed by all. In the ecstasy of things, objects are no longer self-contained but step out of and exhibit themselves. They appear as particularly intense and grab the spectator’s attention. (2008: 165-166)

The way that a shared energy circulation intensifies the appearance of objects, converges with La Pocha Nostra’s practice of recycling props in performance. Fischer-Lichte determines that ‘[s]ince atmosphere is constituted both by the [performers’] presence as well as the ecstasy of things, it impresses itself particularly intensely onto the perceiving subjects. Atmosphere envelops the subjects who become immersed in them’ (2008: 165-166). While Fischer-Lichte’s use of the term ‘ecstasy’ arises from a philosophical perspective, the emphasis on transcendence joins with Gómez-Peña’s creation of a heightened state.

Another factor in the development of a heightened level of awareness is the use of ‘deviance and surprise’. According to Fischer-Lichte, this produces ‘a special challenge for the spectator’s attention’ as ‘constantly on the lookout for deviation, the spectator could still be surprised by its actual, unexpected appearance’ (Ibid., 166). One of the clearest ways in which this tactic is manifested in La Pocha Nostra’s work is through

the shifts in musical accompaniment, to set the tone and pace of the performance.

Whereas in the first hour the music is typically slow and classical/operatic in style, by the final hour it has evolved into the fast-paced sound of throbbing dance music. The fact that a DJ brings about this divergence is also significant, as a symbol of the deviant subculture of clubbing. This reaffirms my argument that there are parallels to be found between immersive/participatory practices, and rave and club culture. Furthermore, it serves as a reminder of live art's enduring relationship with the club scene, most notably with the infamous club night Duckie and the legendary fetish club the Torture Garden.⁴⁸

Performing as a stylised freak during the MOCA production, I used the element of surprise to challenge the audience's perception of my persona. While I began the performance wearing a long red evening gown, this was "lost" over the course of the evening, to reveal my black-and-blue body and hidden appendage, subsequently, undoing the myth of the *twenty-first century blonde "bomb" shell* as a "weapon of mass destruction", and constructing a paradoxical image of abuse and control, feminine and masculine, sexy and grotesque. This demonstrates how challenging dichotomous concepts is an innate theme within La Pocha Nostra's aesthetic, even prior to participation. Importantly, these striking images prepare the audience for the creation of their own hybrid personae during the human mural, through which they will embody the way that binaries can be 'blurry and unspecific' (2005: 24).

Following on from the previous section's analysis of deviance and surprise, this section examines the criterion of 'conspicuousness' as a distinguishing feature of La

⁴⁸ Since the 1990s, Duckie, based at the south London pub the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, and The Torture Garden have hosted live art events. Performing artists at these venues have included Franko B, Fakir Musafar, Ron Athey, Dominic Johnson, Marisa Carnesky, Ursula Martinez, and David Hoyle.

Pocha Nostra's work. In doing so, I will offer two examples of tableaux vivants staged during the performance at MOCA, to demonstrate the way that these remarkable and complex images are arresting to behold. In the first example, see Figure 7, my eyes are drawn to the Grim Reaper (Perry Vasquez) wearing the virginal white slip, his hands appear to be in a position of surrender, perhaps a consequence of his gender bending. The bare chested female (Lucy Hutson) wearing a gas mask and restricted around the neck with rope also intrigues me; she appears to be hiding her 'freak'.



Figure 7: A tableaux vivant with collaborators. Author's own image.

Analysing my persona in the second example, see Figure 8, the cowboy hat, Marilyn Monroe-style wig, and ruby glitter shoes - suggestive of those worn by Dorothy in the 1939 *The Wizard of Oz* film, offer a combination of iconic references to American popular culture. Framed by the American flag held across my body; these symbols work together to offer an image that reads, "There's no place like home". However, the signs are complicated by my just visible nudity beneath the flag; the flowers held between my teeth, indicative of the female Flamenco dancer who appears in Rudolph Valentino's *Blood and Sand* (1924); and perhaps most conspicuous of all: the upside down flag.



Figure 8: A tableaux vivant with an upside down American flag. Author's own image.

The U.S Flag Code states that the American flag should only be displayed upside down as a signal of dire distress in the event of extreme risk to life or property (Title 36, Chapter 10, §176. Respect for flag, a). While my presentation of the upside down flag for political purposes does not constitute dire distress; it acts as a striking metaphor for those risking their lives attempting to cross the Mexican border to the US.

However, I acknowledge that my position as a non-US citizen makes transgressing these rules much easier, and perhaps this is part of the reason that La Pocha Nostra wish to facilitate cross-cultural collaborations. Gómez-Peña notes how his performance group ‘[c]ollaborates across national borders, race, gender, and generations as an act of citizen diplomacy and as a means to create “ephemeral communities” of like-minded rebels. The basic premise of these collaborations is founded on the ideal that “If we learn to cross borders on stage, we may learn how to do so in larger social spheres”’ (2005: 78-79).

The signs in the second example converge to symbolise the complexity within America's cultural history, and the presence of danger to marginalised bodies - note the gagged female, see Figure 8. Moreover, the way that the flag literally conceals my bruised female body, strap-on camouflage dildo, and the words 'destrucción masiva' etched down my back, is representative of how the Bush administration at that time arguably displaced oppressed bodies and the truth, in order to protect its own political agenda. La Pocha Nostra's practice personifies Larry M. Bogad's notion of "irresistible images", coined as a defining term for the compelling, strange or surprising representations that artists and activists create in public confrontation (Bogad in Boyle 2015).

In addition to the irresistible images of La Pocha Nostra, Fischer-Lichte also maintains that:

Performance allows entirely ordinary bodies, actions, movements, things, sounds, or odors to be perceived and has them appear as extra-ordinary and transfigured. Performance makes the ordinary conspicuous. When the ordinary becomes conspicuous, when dichotomies collapse and things turn into their opposites, the spectators perceive the world as "enchanted." Through this enchantment the spectators are transformed. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 179-180)

I propose that this process is actualised in the human mural, in which "real" people can be seen crossing the border into the performative world. Furthermore, their ordinariness is amplified by their close proximity to the superfreaks and irresistible images on display. In the photographs of the young woman with the bow, her normality paradoxically makes her appear exotic, coinciding with Gómez-Peña's notion of a 'reverse anthropology' taking place within this utopian/dystopian space. However, I suggest that audience participation in the human mural is at its most effective and

“enchanting” when it transforms the ordinary, not into the extra-ordinary (more than ordinariness), but into the extraordinary (unusual).

By redistributing the audience’s attention around the theatrical factors distinguished by Fischer-Lichte, La Pocha Nostra produces a heightened level of attention in their spectators. This excess of awareness is referred to by Fischer-Lichte as ‘waste’, which she identifies as enabling spectators to experience themselves as an “embodied mind” within their own presence (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 167; see also 115). Similarly, Gómez-Peña asserts that ‘performance furthers dialogue by creating various pathways, trajectories, and unsuspected intersections which are mostly discovered/learned through the body and later circulated through language and action’ noting that ‘[t]his is precisely where the true political power of the work lies’ (2005: 83). This coincides with Fischer-Lichte’s theory that the mutual physical *contact* between performers and spectators is able to reunite the aesthetic, social and political in performance. It also resonates with the emphasis on an embodied experience inherent within Machon’s concept of “(syn)aesthetic performance”, which she has directly applied to immersive works (2009, 2013). In addition, Cull’s concept of “ontological participation” from an immanent perspective recognises participation’s capacity as an embodied activity to attend to art’s political implications more deeply. However, while Gómez-Peña proposes that following the participants’ embodied experience ‘a process of reflection gets triggered in their perplexed psyches’ (2005: 25), Cull’s theorising suggests that the mind is not distinguishable from the body, therefore, reflection is a continuation of the same single experience (Cull 2011: 82; see also Deleuze 2001: 27).

My analysis of the paradox of participation attests to a duality of experience inside and outside of the performance, but rather than perceiving the mind as in opposition to the body, I have proposed that these two entities have an interdependent relationship during “productive participation”. Furthermore, the synergy between these two elements manifests as a third way of being, corresponding to Ficher-Lichte’s concept of an “embodied mind”. This psychophysical state increases responsiveness and communication between the mind-body system, allowing a deeper understanding of the needs and desires of the self. Consequently, this newfound awareness allows the participant-spectator to progress to more challenging situations that reward them with more gratifying experiences, and transformation even. In addition, I suggest that this attribute of interdependency mirrors the symbiotic ethics of performers and spectators, examined in chapter five.

3.11 Spectator Roles in Participation

As I have indicated, there are three roles available to the audience of La Pocha Nostra’s performances: the performing-spectator, the watching-spectator, and the watching-directing-spectator. My concern in this next section will be to take a closer look at how those roles function and relate to one another within the human mural. The first of these roles to be examined is performing-spectators. For these audience members, improvisation lies at the heart of their experience in the human mural, and this in itself can offer a transformative capacity. As Machon suggests:

This rediscovery through active decision making is transformative; in terms of the way the individual audience member influences the shape of the ‘show’; and transformative, like a rite of passage, where one can be personally and positively changed through the thematic concerns of the event, communicated via its experiential form. (2013: 28)

Reciprocity between the artist and audience is foundational to participatory performance, but in the human mural, there is a further contract of mutuality between those involved in the developing diorama. The exchange of active decision-making is essential to the continuation of an improvised performance, as Keith Johnstone states ‘[g]ood improvisers develop action’ (Johnston 1989: 95). Typically, accepting each other’s ideas during improvisation is challenging for inexperienced improvisers and there is a tendency to block the action from developing (Ibid., 94-95). However, as the action during the human mural only lasts for the time it takes to assume the suggested pose, performing-spectators do not need to sustain a narrative. Nevertheless, a different challenge arises in the form of the spontaneous suggestions offered by the watching audience, which the participants are expected to respond to at will. They are at the mercy of the audience, reaffirming that this is *an aesthetic of risk*.

Drawing on Johan Huizenga’s article ‘Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon’ (1955), the process of image-making in the human mural can be understood as a ‘poetic function’ or rather a ‘*ludic* function’ of “play” (Huizenga 1955: 54 emphasis original). Moreover, there are several points of convergence between the performing-spectators’ improvisation and Huizenga’s summing up of the formal characteristics of play, he states:

[W]e might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (1955: 45-46)

Clearly, there are features here that meet with aspects of the human mural such as rules and “liminality”; however, now I want to look at how ‘material interest’ and ‘secrecy’ function within this work. As I have noted, live art was in part a response by artists to rebel against the art market. Following Huizenga, play’s lack of material interest supports this opposition to commodification because unlike forms such as drawing, painting, or sculpture, nothing tangible is leftover by this mode of artistic practice. To this end, as Eduardo Mendieta acknowledges in conversation with Gómez-Peña: ““imagination” becomes a form of resistance. Yes, indeed, to dream, to dare to produce art, becomes a form of resistance to the relentless and pervasive commodification of everything, even our dysfunctions and most perverse fetishisms’ (Mendieta in Gómez-Peña 2005: 246). Nevertheless, in the era of “the experience economy”, the commodification of participation as experience may well suggest that play is profitable.

The characteristic of secrecy within play, specifically manifested as ‘disguise’, coincides with the prominent use of costuming within the human mural. According to Huizenga:

People nowadays try to feel the essence of savage life. This kind of exoticism may sometimes be a little affected... Modern man is very sensitive to the far-off and the strange. Nothing helps him so much in his understanding of savage society as his feeling for masks and disguise... The sight of the masked figure, as a purely aesthetic experience, carries us beyond “ordinary life” into a world where something other than daylight reigns; it carries us back to the world of the savage, the child and the poet, which is the world of play. (1955: 55)

This statement has particular resonance with La Pocha Nostra’s practice, as Gómez-Peña claims that ‘[w]e are now fully installed in what I term the culture of the mainstream bizarre’ as such ““Alternative” thought, “fringe” subcultures, and “radical” behavior, as we knew them, have actually become the mainstream’ (2005: 50-51). This poses a problem for La Pocha Nostra, and live artists more broadly, who run the risk of

being mistaken for ‘the very stylised freaks we are attempting to deconstruct or parody’ (Ibid., 52). Rather than challenging Debord’s “society of the spectacle” (1967), the human mural may be swallowed up by Bourriaud’s ‘society of extras’ (2002: 25-26). This corresponds with the argument that participatory performance may in actuality produce the illusion of sociability and political engagement (see Gritzner; Bishop, Harvie). As Gómez-Peña tells us: ‘Nowadays, spectacle replaces content; form gets heightened; “meaning” (remember meaning?) evaporates, or rather, fades out; boredom sinks in and everybody searches for the next “extreme” image or experience. Ethical and political implications are fading memories of the past century’ (2005: 50-51).

I propose that the ethical and political effects of participation are further problematised by the inherent rules of play, which frame and limit agency for the performing-spectator. As Huizenga’s asserts: ‘All play has its rules’ and they ‘are absolutely binding and allow no doubt’, but more importantly the ‘player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a “spoil-sport”’ (1955: 44). Therefore, once implicated in the human mural it is difficult not to obediently follow the suggestions made by Gómez-Peña and the watching-directing-spectators. This is a situation exacerbated by the impression that we wish to make on others, discussed in chapter five, applying Erving Goffman’s theory on “front” (1959). It also meets with the same narcissistic desire and need to be a “good” spectator that motivated the performing-spectators to accept the invitation in the first place. In addition, the risk of immersing spectators in play is that they may become too involved in the action, and lose the ability to reflect on what they are doing, therefore, converging with Rancière’s suggestion that, in fact, we may find an ‘active interpreter’ in a ‘distant spectator’ (Rancière 2009: 13).

To identify the transformative potential of play within the situation of the human mural, I will return to the significance of reciprocity and Fischer-Lichte's analysis of the effects of the "autopoietic feedback loop". She notes that '[i]n performance, aesthetic experience and liminal experience ultimately coincide due to the workings and effects of the "autopoietic feedback loop" and that 'every turn the feedback loop takes must also be seen as a transition and hence as a liminal situation' (2008: 177-178). Fischer-Lichte sees these 'turns' as emerging from spectators' actions and performers' reactions. However, I suggest that it is the reciprocal interactions between co-participants in the human mural which enables them to 'experience themselves as co-determinate participants of the action. Neither fully autonomous nor fully determined by others' (Ibid., 164-165). These transitions between participants in the act of improvisation drive the "autopoietic feedback loop", and 'carry a high potential for creating liminality throughout the performance' (Ibid., 178). This experience of liminality is capable of affecting changes to the performer-spectator's body, altering their status, and creating communities (Ibid., 179).

Still, Fischer-Lichte notes that the permanence of the transformation will differ between participants, and may result in a liminal experience, stating that:

Spectators could also dismiss their transitory destabilization as silly and unfounded when leaving the auditorium and revert to their previous value system. Alternatively, they might remain in a state of destabilization for long after the performance's end and only reorient themselves much later upon reflection. (Ibid)

In both of these outcomes Fischer-Lichte maintains that the performance constitutes a liminal experience; however, she is quick to highlight that liminality in performance lacks two qualities that are present when framed as social ritual: 'durability

(irreversibility)’ and ‘social recognition’ (Ibid). This corresponds to the way that Schechner makes a distinction between ‘performances where performers are changed “transformations” and those where performers are returned to their starting places “transportations”’ (Schechner 1981: 269). I am reminded of when I was returned to the audience post-participation in *Ex Centris*, whereupon I discovered that my newfound artist status had expired, as the audience and photographers that had gathered shifted their attention elsewhere. Similarly, my community of stylised freaks, formed over the course of the human mural, quickly disbanded once the performance was over.

To further understand the notion of community that manifested during my participation in *Ex Centris*, this section will consider the concept of “communitas”. The theory of “communitas” was developed by Victor and Edith Turner; it serves to distinguish ‘the sense of sharing and intimacy that develops among persons who experience liminality as a group’ (E. Turner 2005: 97). In my reflection on participation in *Ex Centris*, I talked about a kind of telepathy that developed between the co-participants, consistent with Edith Turner’s observation that communitas fosters an ability to ‘read each other’s minds’ (E. Turner 2005: 98). Communitas is particularly relevant to the activist art of La Pocha Nostra because it ascends ‘1) through the interstices of structure in *liminality*, times of change of status, 2) at the edges of structure, in *marginality*, and 3) from beneath structure in *inferiority*’ (Ibid). La Pocha Nostra’s “ephemeral communities” of like-minded rebels’ (Gomez-Peña 2005: 78-79) are representative of the way in which communitas can arise from a position of subordination. Nevertheless, as Victor Turner recognises:

Spontaneous communitas, however, is very difficult to hold on to. ... The great difficulty is to keep this intuition alive – regular drugging won’t do it, repeated sexual union won’t do it, constant immersion in great literature won’t do it,

initiation seclusion must sooner or later come to an end. We thus encounter the paradox that the experience of *communitas* becomes the memory of *communitas*. (Turner 1982: 47)

Similarly, one might also apply the paradox of *communitas* to the way in which the *experience* of participation becomes the *memory* of participation, or increasingly the *documentation* of participation. This memory of *communitas*, described by Edith Turner as a ‘gift of togetherness’ with ‘something magical about it’ (E Turner 2005: 98), is one of the reasons that spectators seek further participatory opportunities, as a way of reliving their original experience. However, an alternative perspective to the realisation that *communitas* is hard to ‘hold on to’, is the notion that these transformative experiences can be difficult to shake off and may produce a variety of conflicting emotions in the participant.

Contradictory feelings towards participation are also stirred in the second role available to audience members: the watching-spectator. I propose that participation can produce a myriad of reactions in onlookers towards their participatory counterparts including but not limited to: **jealousy** that they are in a more rarefied position and one which affords them special knowledge; **relief** that someone else has volunteered, diverting the pressure to perform; **anxiety** that a non-professional has been given a position of authority and may not be up to the job; **excitement** at the spontaneity and risks implied; **empathy**, as they were formerly one of us and will be again; **inadequacy** for not being brave or talented enough to partake; **admiration** for their courage and ability to perform; **regret and self-reproach** for not participating when you know that you could have; **shock** that “real” people would be willing to get up on stage and take their clothes off in front of strangers. Indeed, most watching-spectators will experience a number of these sensations while witnessing participation, complicating their

relationship to the work. Yet, the role of the watching-spectator is a key factor in fuelling the performing-spectator's narcissistic desire for participation, as Gómez-Peña tells us:

[t]hese new audience members are always ready to walk on stage at any invitation from the artist and do something, particularly if participation involves impersonating other cultures or taking off their clothes. It's karaoke time. It's like a live computer game with the added excitement that people, "real people," are watching. (2005: 54)

Finally, in the third role available within La Pocha Nostra's practice, the watching-directing-spectators are able to regain some power back from the performing-spectators, without having to cross the border. Embodying Rancière's concept that emancipation establishes equality between looking and acting, the watching-directing-spectators demonstrate that looking **is** acting. Moreover, as 'distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them' they are free to refashion the human mural in their own way (Rancière 2009: 13), while acknowledging Wilkinson's argument, outlined in chapter two, that shared cultural values and narrative conventions may also play their part (Wilkinson 2015: 142). While the experience of *communitas* may be to the exclusion of those outside of the human mural, a hierarchical model of spectatorship that privileges doing over seeing is disrupted by the inclusion of watching-directing-spectators.

3.12 Consequences and Potentialities

Over the last three chapters, and in the discussions still to come, it is evident that artists give a great deal of thought to the way in which they prepare spectators for participation. However, the same cannot be said for their handling of the 'cool-down', a term used by Schechner in his 1981 article 'Performers and Spectators Transported and

Transformed'. Writing about the 'cool-down' in relation to acting, Schechner observes that '[g]etting put of the role is sometimes harder than getting into it' and '[w]hat the "cool down" does is return the performer to an ordinary sphere of existence: to transport him back to where he began' (Schechner 1981: 269). This necessary process is not only applicable to the actor but also to the performing-spectator, who traverses the "ordinary world" to the "performative world" and back again. Echoing Schechner, 'he is transformed, enabled to do things "in performance" he cannot do ordinarily. But when the performance is over, or even as a final phase of the performance, he returns to where he started. Otherwise he is left hanging' (Schechner 1981: 270). The job of the 'cool-down' is to allow the performing-spectator to re-enter the 'ordinary world'. Yet, Schechner's observation that little attention has been given to this area in the field of acting, continues into the field of immersive and participatory practices. Indeed, in chapter two, I referenced Maravala and Ramos's assertion that the management of an active audience 'would benefit from more rigorous investigation and care' (2016); one area in which this applies is post-participatory experience. How do artists take care of participants after their experience? This is particularly pertinent when working with non-professional performers, who may not have the experience or skills to easily get out of their role. Furthermore, how do participants take care of themselves while fulfilling their responsibility to the performance? It should also be acknowledged that my calling attention to the importance of care within this feminised form is consistent with care-focused feminism,⁴⁹ and more broadly my consideration of a feminist perspective on participation throughout the thesis.

⁴⁹ A branch of feminist thought, which has emerged primarily out of the writings on the ethics of care by Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings.

In my attendance at numerous participatory performances over the last ten years, including those under discussion, the only ‘cool-down’ that I have witnessed is in the form of the ad hoc “how was it for you?” chat between artists and participants in the bar/cloakroom afterwards. More often than not, ethical responsibility for the participant ends once the experience is over. In my third encounter, as a performer in the ‘border zone’ I had felt an ethical responsibility to take care of my co-participant: the spectator-tourist. However, when the performance had ended, I left her to find her own way back to where she had come from. Typically, spectators post-participation must deal with the consequences of their actions alone. The lack of a ‘cool-down’ is a contributing factor to the way in which participants take to social media to share their experiences. In this way, sites such as Facebook and Twitter become spaces to decompress. Furthermore, as I will show in the example of Abramović in chapter four, artists themselves are now adopting the use of social media to create a place for reflection (as well as collating useful data for funding applications).

For La Pocha Nostra, there is a deliberate attempt to leave the participant ‘hanging’, as they intend for the experience to ‘haunt the spectator’s dreams, memories, and conversations’ (Gómez-Peña 2005: 25). While this proved to be an effective strategy in my case, creating the impetus for this study; it is not without its pitfalls and risks. Additionally, these risks can become inflated when the stakes are high such as in the activist art of La Pocha Nostra, or when there is a strong immersive or transformative capacity.

To further explore the potential after-effects of participation, I will reflect on my experience post-participation in *Ex Centris*. In the *Live Culture* film footage of *Ex*

Centris, I appear timid and self-conscious, as I attempt to get dressed following my participation in the human mural. The frame of performance had given me licence to behave in ways that were otherwise outside of my everyday identity. As John Freeman notes, ‘body art and performance allow for the possibility of performers revealing themselves without the consequences that such revelations would lead to in their daily lives’ (2015: 172). However, once the performance had ended, I found myself reflecting on my actions. Later that day, when I happened upon Gómez-Peña, I was struck by the fact that he did not appear to recognise me; it was as if our exchange had meant nothing. In light of this, and as a strategy for unravelling a spectator’s mixed emotions post-performance, I wish to draw an analogy between a participatory performance encounter and a one-night stand sexual encounter.⁵⁰

Firstly, the motivations of hedonism and narcissism are frequently the catalyst for both forms of interaction. In the case of the one-night stand, these desires are often fuelled by alcohol, as impaired judgement is known to lead to more risky-behaviour. It is worth noting that alcohol is frequently given special provision in participatory practice, with the bar offering further opportunities for interaction in both Punchdrunk’s *The Drowned Man* (2014) and Secret Cinema’s *The Empire Strikes Back* (2015). In addition, La Pocha Nostra sometimes set up a bar area, although not in any of the productions that I attended. As Gómez-Peña observes, ‘the audience changes as they become dramatically less inhibited during and after the ingestion of tropical cocktails or

⁵⁰ As I discussed in chapter one, in relation to my methodology, I acknowledge that my interpretation of a one-night stand sexual encounter is guided by my personal background and experiences, rather than being a collective understanding of the term. The way that this term can be viewed differently, depending on your perspective, mirrors the way that participants’ can have varying expectations of a participatory exchange.

shots of strong liquor. This scenario allows for a more “revealing” performance’ (2005: 84).

Secondly, a need for physical intimacy is palpable in both forms of encounter. Aside from the fact that intimacy is a complex phenomenon to define, Gomme notes that ‘[p]opular understandings rest on a generalised assumption of “intimacy” as a desirable access to, or sharing of, private aspects of oneself, usually with a singular other’ (2015: 283). One of the chief complaints made about participation is a dissatisfaction at the level of intimacy achieved, which is frequently less than expected and sought after, but not necessarily less than what was promised. This is consistent with a one-night stand, where intimacy can be intense but at the same time short-lived and insincere.⁵¹

Thirdly, the environment leading up to both participation in performance and a one-night stand works to create a “heightened state” that lifts the individual from their everyday reality and lessens their inhibitions. An immersive element, emphasised in participatory practice, is largely produced through the ‘in-its-own-worldness’ quality, defined by Josephine Machon (2013: 93), which frequently makes use of lighting and sound design to enhance the *mise en scène* or “total” environment. One-night stands regularly develop out of contexts such as parties, nightclubs and bars, where the setting has been refined to enhance the atmosphere; again lighting and sound are prominent strategies here. As Alexander Lambert suggests in his 2013 book *Intimacy and Friendship on Facebook?*, these recreational enclaves can be seen to possess liminal qualities such as their ability to produce spontaneous social interaction between strangers (2013: 119), akin to the spectator-to-spectator contact produced by

⁵¹ This is not to say that one-night stands do not have the potential to be sincere and joyous, precisely because of their ephemeral nature.

participation. Yet, Lambert reminds us, citing Turner (1969), liminal moments are transitory and quickly dissolve when we resume our everyday life (Ibid; see also White 2013: 140; see also Fischer-Lichte 2008: 175-176).

For this reason, I wish to draw attention to the final point of comparison and the title for this study: ‘the morning after (the night before)’. This is a popular expression recalled after an evening of drinking, upon which the person must face their hangover and the significances of their actions. For participant-spectators, this hangover is an after-effect of their ‘hanging’; like those waking up from a one-night stand, they can have mixed emotions following their activities including euphoria, embarrassment and regret. As I have already intimated, there can also be a comparable feeling of social awkwardness on seeing an artist or co-participant outside of the context of your experience, especially when they do not remember or acknowledge you. Although participatory practice may appear to respond to the desire for intimacy and a “real” encounter, it is, in the end, a performance. Actually, as Gomme notes, the participant-spectator’s ‘most fundamental boundary will be the knowledge that *this* is a *performance*, an experience [they] can to some extent abstract from “real” life’ (2015: 290 emphasis original).

For many, a participatory performance encounter is literally a one-night experience, and not something to be repeated. This is either because you know that it won’t be as exciting the second time around or because you didn’t like how it made you feel the first time. Occasionally, however, one-night stands develop into love affairs and relationships; hence, we find the emergence of devotee participant-spectators like the “superfans” of Punchdrunk’s work.

To further understand the significance of intimacy in participation, my analysis of La Pocha Nostra's performance methodology has revealed many shared characteristics with Lisa Register and Tracy Henley's 'Phenomenology of Intimacy' (1992), indicative of the potential for intimacy within their work. As Register and Henley identify, intimate experiences are structured around seven themes: non-verbal communication, presence, time, boundary, body, destiny and surprise and transformation (Register and Henley 1992: 472). As we have seen, a number of these themes are factors around which spectators focus their attention in La Pocha Nostra's productions. Reflecting on my own experiences with performing-spectators during *Ex Centris* and the performance at MOCA, these elements worked to varying degrees to establish a sense of intimacy. Similar to Gomme's encounter of participation with a stranger, I recall a strong sense of co-presence with both of my female co-participants, in a shared experience that was 'both *spontaneously* arrived at and ours alone' (Gomme 2015: 297). In particular, I am drawn to Register and Henley's paradoxical combination of destiny and surprise, to elucidate the way in which these mutual physical exchanges felt strange and at the same time natural, even something close to fated. Furthermore, I propose that this notion plays a central role in creating a romanticised view of participation in the perceiving subject. I am also mindful that in my case this romanticism has increased because the interactions were caught on camera, evoking feelings of nostalgia for the intimacy once held and now lost.

As Gomme recognises 'it is only when the two parties are involved on an equal basis, co-participants rather than performer and spectator, that something approaching shared intimacy begins to arise' (Ibid., 297). Yet, adopting Levinas's writing, she

elucidates how in participatory performance ‘the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery: the other’s entire being is constituted by its exteriority, or rather its alterity’ (Levinas 1987: 75-76 in Gomme 2015: 290). Deeper consideration of my own encounters reveals that while physically connected to the female in the Mexican hat and literally bound to the young woman with the bow, they are always outside of my comprehension. Notwithstanding our co-presence as mutual determination, my co-participants remain a stranger to me. In the end, as Gomme so eloquently puts it: ‘I come up against the utter unknowability of the other in front of me, the wall of the other’s face. I am forced to fall back on myself, to engage with the resonance of this encounter within me. In such encounters, it must ultimately be myself that I come to meet’ (Ibid., 291). This suggests that intimacy in participation may be less about an encounter with another and more about an encounter with the self; a notion that I examine further in the subsequent chapters.

3.13 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has demonstrated that there are numerous paradoxical relationships at work within participatory performance practices. The most obvious of these contradictions is the way that participants hold the dual position of performer and spectator, both seeing and doing, inside and outside of the performance at the same time. However, as I have proposed, the mind and the body are not in opposition during participation but interdependent, ensuring that we realise our responsibility to the work and to ourselves. The mind-body system underlines “productive participation”, safeguards the experience, and most importantly, it takes care of the participant. I suggest that it is the symbiosis of the mind and body during participation that enables

the spectator to become an “embodied mind” within their own presence (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 115); I will expand on this reading in the next chapter.

My analysis has revealed further contradictions including the interplay between autonomy and heteronomy, emancipation and compliance, ordinary and extraordinary, experience and memory/documentation, destiny and surprise, self and other. Yet, these paradoxical interactions, actualised in La Pocha Nostra’s work, do not represent an “either/or” situation in which one side has capacity and one does not. Instead, they realise Fischer-Lichte’s theory that participation can bring about a process of reenchantment, whereupon we perceive a new relationship to these binary pairs premised on a condition of “as well as” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 207). The border crossing of spectators within La Pocha Nostra’s practice is an extension of the blurring of binary relations that permeates their aesthetic, to which participants of the human mural contribute their own bodies of conspicuous opposition. To this end, as Mendieta suggests, “imagination” is a form of resistance (in Gómez-Peña 2005: 246); however, we are reminded by Gómez-Peña of the danger that these participatory spectacles may be mistaken for ‘another “extreme” variety act in the extensive and ever-changing menu of global culture’ (Ibid., 51).

The chapter has noted that participation divides opinion, loved by some and loathed by others. I have considered what motivates audience members to participate, acknowledging the influence of narcissism and hedonism, recognised by Alston (Alston 2013: 130). Conversely, I have explored the potential resistances to participation, drawing attention to how it can demand more than some spectators are willing or able to give. I have also highlighted the presence of expert participant-spectators within

participatory live art, and the way that they can influence the process. Addressing competition amongst spectators within participation, while recognising the potential downsides of this behaviour, at the same time I have suggested that competition can extend the potential of participants, and consequently the performance. My analysis has emphasised how participation is not just invited, but extorted from spectators through a range of strategies and tactics towards garnering a special complicity (Alston 2013: 129; see also Fried 1968: 127) with the audience. Furthermore, once embroiled in participation the spectator is compelled to adhere to the rules, for fear that they might be thought of as a “spoil-sport” (Huizenga 1955: 44) or worst still a “bad” spectator.

On the emancipation of spectators, the discussion has outlined how the motivations of La Pocha Nostra meet with those previously identified by Bishop, namely activation, authorship and community (Bishop 2006a: 12). Nonetheless, I have established that in the context of live art, emancipation has more to do with activating the spectator than liberating them from a designated seat. The majority of my examination has focused on what transpires during the human mural - the site of the spectator’s activation. In this ‘border zone’, I have reasoned that authorship is explicitly requested and subsequently shared with spectators; however, it is managed and eventually returned to Gómez-Peña. As the designers of the framework for participation, ultimately, La Pocha Nostra is accountable for the performance. Corresponding to Fisher’s conception of radical democratic theatre providing a ‘space for speech’ (Fisher 2011: 25), the human mural provides a “demilitarised zone” that encourages alternative representations of identity and structures of society to emerge. Nonetheless, this ‘space for speech’ follows, to some extent, the script prepared by La Pocha Nostra; inscribed with explicit and

implicit instructions and expectations, and “charged” by both the strong presence of Gómez-Peña and the performances that have gone before.

Concerning the creation of a community within La Pocha Nostra’s work, I have determined that a feeling of *communitas* emerges amongst co-participants of the human mural, but this dissipates when the performance is over. However, the encounter may re-emerge as a memory or be relived through documentation. I have established that the reciprocal transitions of “play” between participants during the human mural drive the “autopoietic feedback loop”, increasing the capacity for liminality and transformation. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 178). However, the physical separation and even elevation of those who are ‘participation-rich’ from those who are ‘participation-poor’ can point to a new social structure for the audience. Still, the additional role of the watching-directing-spectator goes some way to complicating that structure by embodying the notion that seeing **is** doing.

In my analysis of La Pocha Nostra’s methodology, I have found many parallels with ritual, implied by their own adoption of the term “interactive rituals” to frame their “social dramas” (Turner 1986: 74). In particular, I have outlined how the crossing of one space to another replicates the crossing of a threshold, therein bringing about a process of transformation or more typically “transportation” (Schechner 1981: 269). Additionally, I have found common ground between participatory performance and club culture, suggestive of a potential area for further consideration. Exploring the way that spectators are prepared for their border crossing, I have shown how the characteristics of La Pocha Nostra’s performances converge with a set of theatrical factors pinpointed by Fischer-Lichte, towards a heightened level of awareness. Indeed, performance

makers may also draw on this set of principles as a potential system towards a methodology of participation and the production of “irresistible images” (Bogad in Boyle 2015).

Reflecting on the consequences of participation, I have drawn attention to the lack of after-care given to spectators post-participation. In my examination of the effects of being left ‘hanging’, I have offered the metaphor of a one-night stand sexual encounter, to elucidate the feelings that a spectator can experience post-participation. Corresponding with Gomme’s analysis, deeper reflection on my own encounters testify that it is in the mutual exchange between co-participants, rather than a performer and spectator, that a shared experience of intimacy may arise (Gomme 2015: 297). Nevertheless, adopting Gomme’s reading of Levinas, the ‘unknowability’ of my co-participants in the ‘border zone’ turned the shared-encounter back in on itself, to manifest as a self-encounter.

In summary, my analysis has demonstrated that border crossing in the interactive rituals of La Pocha Nostra is a complex and contradictory process. The strategies and tactics that foster and manage the live and participating audience mediate the emancipation of spectators. Despite the emphasis on activation, I propose that the final image of emancipation in La Pocha Nostra’s extreme performance games is the one where spectator-tourists are set free from their everyday selves, even if only to be returned to where they came from once the performance has ended.

Chapter Four: The Spectator is Present

4.1 The Fourth Encounter: Marina Abramović's *512 Hours* (2014)

Standing in the queue for Marina Abramović's *512 Hours*, I note a couple of girls taking a "selfie". They are documenting their place in what the gallery claims is an unforgettable moment in the history of performance art.⁵² The length of the line (see Figure 9) and record audience figures, over 125,000 visitors in less than three-months, bears testament to Abramović's celebrity.



*Figure 9: The queue for Marina Abramović's *512 Hours*. Photo by: Adrian Searle.⁵³*

As I finally, some two hours later, gain admittance to the Serpentine, my hand is stamped with the name of the piece and date, 24 August 2014. The act of queuing followed by the stamping process is a reminder of my clubbing days; looking down at the black ink it would seem that this performance is intent on making a direct impression on my body.

Along with my companion and a group of fellow spectators, an assistant gives us a pre-performance set of instructions. We are told that there is no talking or whispering allowed from the cloakroom onwards. We are also requested to deposit our belongings,

⁵² This claim was made on the Serpentine's signage for the exhibition.

⁵³ The source for the image is <https://twitter.com/SearleAdrian/status/476649600892542976/photo/1>

including our mobile phone and watch, in the lockers provided. Inside the cloakroom there is a large pile of headphones and one of Abramović's helpers indicates that we should put them on. With our lives locked away and our sense of sound cut off, we entered the first gallery space. However, to my disappointment, this was at just the moment that Abramović seemed to be leaving. Indeed, for the first hour and fifteen minutes of my visit Abramović was not in the space:⁵⁴ her presence all the more notable by her absence. I couldn't escape the feeling that the atmosphere, though expectant at the beginning, lacked the kind of heightened energy that she is known to produce or that comes from being in the same space as someone with celebrity-artist status.

On entering the performance I am faced with a double paradox. First, as a researcher my compulsion to look for "something" is in opposition to achieving the state of mindfulness⁵⁵ that is being sought in the experience. Second, I am met once more with the "paradox of participation", which is particularly striking in this experience because spectators are divided into those that are watching and those that are doing. Throughout the piece I am constantly torn between observation and participation - not to say that these terms are mutually exclusive.

Within a few minutes my ability to observe is radically altered, as along with my loss of hearing I am led into the centre of the main room to "the platform", where a group of standing participants appears to be meditating, see Figure 10.

⁵⁴ In 'Artist Talk: Marina Abramović in Conversation with Sam Keller' Abramović explains that for the last three-weeks of the exhibition she didn't work with the public because things happened without her.

⁵⁵ Mindfulness is defined by Merriam Webster as: 'the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis; also: such a state of awareness'.



Figure 10: The platform. Photo by: Marco Anelli.⁵⁶

Instructed to close my eyes, all at once I embody the double contradiction of whether to remain inside the performance in the art of doing “nothing” or leave my position to watch from the sidelines. On the outside, I may be afforded a more holistic view of the piece which will enable me to find the “something”; however, by lessening my embodied experience of the work I may miss the point of the “nothing”. It was this predicament that troubled my engagement with the piece throughout my time at the gallery. This tension between seeing and doing was emphasised further when my attempts to observe were frequently interrupted by Abramović’s assistants, who continued to urge me to engage in the activities. Towards the end of the piece, I began to consciously avoid making eye contact with the helpers; defiant in my choice to watch rather than participate, and clinging on to whatever freedom I still had left.

4.2 Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to unravel my encountering of Abramović’s *512 Hours*, by examining spectator-participation in relation to three prominent facets of the work: the cultural value of *being there*; agency and the display of agency; and most significantly

⁵⁶ The image is courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives and The Serpentine Gallery, London. The source is <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot/from-desert-dreams:-marina-abramovi%C4%87%E2%80%99s-enduring-art/6564096>

the role of presence in its numerous guises. These three elements represent some of the most contentious and striking interactions with participatory practice, and they are especially visible in this durational performance given its emphasis on ‘being present’. My argument will demonstrate how multiple articulations of presence enable Abramović to develop an intense relationship with her audience, which in turn allows them to have a greater awareness of the self, others and the world around them. In my analysis ‘being present’ is established as a process and ‘act of persistence’, as the philosopher Martin Heidegger determines:

The word ‘being’ now no longer means what something is. We hear ‘being’ as a verb, as in ‘being present’ and ‘being absent.’ ‘To be’ means to perdure and persist. But this says more than just ‘last and abide.’ ‘It is in being’ means ‘it persists in its presence,’ and in its persistence concerns and moves us.
(Heidegger 1971: 95)

Therefore, articulated as a fluid phenomenon, presence is susceptible to shifting perceptions. This analysis will unravel the varying conditions and terms of presence that reveal themselves in *512 Hours* and how they converge with the emergent processes of participation, and the possibilities and limitations that these experiences produce.

The first part of the discussion begins with the lengthy lines outside of the Serpentine and the relationship that participatory practice has with “the experience economy”, to use Joseph Pine and James Gilmore’s (1999) term. It draws attention to the way that *512 Hours* is promoted as a unique experience and the perceived cultural value of attending an artwork by Abramović. I establish how the “I was there” of participation can create its own form of heightened self-presence in the spectator. The discussion engages with recent debates concerning the commodification and spectacle of participation, citing Jen Harvie, Adam Alston, Noah Horowitz, and Joseph Pine and James Gilmore.

The second part of my analysis expands on the issue of social value by looking at the agency afforded to the audience, engaging with Astrid Breel's current research in this area. I examine the "openness" of this work and the choices and freedoms that are afforded the audience. I establish the type of agency employed by Abramović to bring forth participation and question to what extent this work presents a display of agency rather than actual agency. During this discussion I reflect on my own difficulty becoming fully engaged in the piece, or what we might think of as "imaginatively immersed".

What follows for the remainder of the chapter is a detailed unravelling of the varying modes of presence to yield participation. This begins with an examination of the preconception, encouraged by Abramović, that *512 Hours* has an inherent capacity for failure, which I suggest produces a heightened self-awareness in participants' expectant bodies that founds an intense form of energy. In my analysis I draw on Alston's writing on risk as a fundamental element of spectators' desire for participatory practice. The investigation then turns to the bodily presence of Abramović and how 'having presence' forms a vital part of participation in the work. I determine the "auratic presence" of the artist, to borrow Cormac Power's (2008) term, and demonstrate how her command of theatrical stage presence influences participation, drawing on Erika Fischer-Lichte's "strong concept of presence" and the writings of Jane Goodall. This leads to a discussion on the way in which participation in *512 Hours* fosters an embodied concept of presence or "prae-sens".⁵⁷ My analysis will draw on Fischer-Lichte's "radical concept of presence" written as "PRESENCE: PRESENCE", Josephine Machon's

⁵⁷ "Prae-sens" is a term appropriated by Josephine Machon, following Elaine Scarry (see Scarry, 1985: 9, 197 in Machon 2009: 25).

theory of “(syn)aesthetics”, and Hélène Cixous’s “écriture féminine”. Indeed, all of these approaches share common ground with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “phenomenology of perception”. In contrast to these models, I will consider Laura Cull’s theory of “ontological participation”, including her thoughts on attention in action. This will extend into a further discussion on the phenomenology of presence as co-presence through the lens of participation, engaging with the critical concepts of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas, supported by Simon Jones’s reading of their work.

This investigation takes an open-eyed look at Abramović’s most recent participatory practice, which includes acknowledging the way that her fame may have altered perceptions of the work, as well as her own perspective. Yet, despite the potential problems that I highlight in this work, I would also want to stress that it is difficult to think of another single artist who has contributed more to developing an art of participation. According to Abramović, *512 Hours* represented an important moment in her career, maintaining that she could not have had the confidence to do it before: “to create something where there is nothing there” (KunstSpektrum 2014). I managed to attend the durational performance on the penultimate day of its run, having avoided any reviews or accounts of the piece. After my visit I actively sought out other perceptions of the experience, in the media, at the dedicated Tumblr, on Twitter, and from friends and acquaintances who had attended the performance. While some of these opinions repeated my own concerns with the piece, there were many accounts, particularly on Tumblr and Twitter, which suggested that *512 Hours* had produced an intense and transformative experience for its participants.

4.3 The “I was there” of Participation

This section will examine the first manifestation of presence that I witnessed when attending *512 Hours*, which I have distinguished as the “I was there” of participation. In this discussion I will establish how a perceived cultural value in attending Marina Abramović’s art produced a heightened level of self-presence in the spectators, epitomised by the selfie. Indeed, photographs of hands and wrists carrying the *512 Hours* stamp, which dominate the *512 Hours* Twitter feed, are indicative of the way that Abramović’s participatory practice has become commodified as experience. In his *Art of the Deal: Contemporary art in a global financial market* (2014), Noah Horowitz investigates the extent to which the global art world has become experientialist. One aspect that he underscores is the way that the contemporary art experience has become an important social occasion (2014: 122). He also perceives this tendency as a touristic enthusiasm for experiencing the *being there*; to look at the art of course, but perhaps more significantly to consume the *art lifestyle* (Ibid., emphasis mine). Following Jen Harvie, Alston draws attention to the relationship between immersive theatre and a neoliberalist ethos, specifically in the way that it ‘encourages opportunism, the perception of personal autonomy and favours those with the capacity to act upon it’ (2013: 16).⁵⁸ However, as I noted in chapter two, *512 Hours* does not possess the type of ‘in-its-own-worldness’ quality specified in Machon’s definition (2013: 93). Nonetheless, echoing Tassos Stevens, I would wish to acknowledge that the performance had the capacity to enable participants to be imaginatively immersed, resulting from their mindfulness. Alston, citing Baz Kershaw (2001) and Dan Rebellato (2009), emphasises the growth of consuming audiences in theatre generally and their

⁵⁸ See also “entrepreneurial participation” in section 3.4.

eagerness for commodities that brag to others that “I was there” (2013: 13). While there was merchandise for *512 Hours* available, I propose that the selfie (hands and wrists more than faces) has become an extension of the commodification of ephemeral and experiential art.

Alston suggests that because risk is fundamental to many participatory experiences, with the potential for misunderstanding or transgressing the protocols, the “I was there” boast might be repackaged as “I dared” (Ibid., 13). In the case of an Abramović experience, I maintain that the “I dared” is exchanged for “I met Marina”. What is interesting is the way that the two girls taking the selfie wanted to document their experience even before they had entered the gallery. This suggests a kind of “presentness” located in the past but at the same time looking to the future presentness, to the moment when the selfie may be shared, “liked” and “tweeted”. I propose that the selfie acts as a form of memorabilia, corresponding to Pine and Gilmore’s assertion that people purchase souvenirs (or take photographs of themselves) ‘as tangible artifacts of the experiences they want to remember’ (1999: 57). Furthermore, it coincides with a desire to show others what we have encountered, to generate conversation and even jealousy (Ibid). As I have already highlighted, the proliferation of participatory performances has developed concurrently with the explosion of social networks. These communication platforms offer an opportunity to socialise our experiences and to entice new participants. This has clearly not gone unnoticed by Abramović, evident in her uptake of Tumblr to document *512 Hours*.

In their book *The Experience Economy* (1999), Pine and Gilmore propose that we have entered a new economic era: “the experience economy”, which seeks to engage

consumers in an authentic and personal way. They claim that those that recognise the potential for creating compelling experiences will bring forth new economic growth. Over the past few decades a flurry of new experiences have emerged (Pine and Gilmore 1999: 2), most notably in the contemporary visual and performance arts. The concept of “commoditisation” is repugnant to most live artists, as an ephemeral art form that has its origins in a reaction against the commercial art market. However, an art of experience appears to be increasingly privileged over other art forms because of its perceived consumer value, most notably by funded galleries. When we are talking about value, it raises the question: what type of currency are we dealing with in participatory live art? In *512 Hours* the admission was free, although various keepsakes⁶² were available to buy. Nevertheless, the performance was financially accessible to all, consistent with the rhetoric of participation as a democratising of the arts. This is in contrast to the expensive ticket prices for works by immersive companies Punchdrunk and Secret Cinema, who even offer enhanced packages with extras to the standard experience. However, it should be remembered that the ambitious scale of these productions does represent a significant financial investment to be recuperated. While *512 Hours* did not necessarily accrue value in the monetary sense, at the same time its popularity would have had a positive impact on the appeal of Abramović’s artworks more generally and the status of the Serpentine Gallery.

Looking at value in another way, Jen Harvie’s *Fair Play* proposes that participatory practices appear to promise social value in two pertinent ways:

First, they seem to offer widespread constructive social engagement, with participants communicating, collaborating, co-creating and mutually supporting one another. Second, they appear to extend this invitation to engage socially

⁶² A vinyl and a book were available to purchase from the Serpentine Gallery.

very widely, across all audiences equitably, perhaps even democratically. (2013: 1-2).

This notion of social value can be seen to be realised in *512 Hours* in the way that it brought people together who would not ordinarily share the same space, “like a Bangladeshi housewife together with a science-fiction writer, with a kid, with a person from Gaza with the Palestinians” (Abramović in KunstSpektrum 2014).⁵⁹ However, it is difficult to ascertain how regularly this type of exchange happened over the duration of the installation performance, and to what extent this represents a “trophy” example. Harvie questions whether these works ‘offer a spectacle of communication and social engagement rather more than a qualitatively and sustainably rich and even critical engagement’ (2013: 3). This corresponds to Gritzner’s earlier contention that participation remains ‘like all art, an illusion, a semblance (appearance)’ (2011: 109). What is more, Harvie cautions that these experiences in sociability may act as a temporary distraction away from more long-standing social structures (2013: 3).

Echoing Harvie, there is no denying that *512 Hours* represented a spectacle of social engagement, given its scale and notoriety, huge audience lines, large infrastructure of gallery assistants, and up to 160 attendees at a time. The social exchanges that formed as part of the “public experiment” (Serpentine Galleries 2015) were framed by the gallery as art rather than social reality, and were mostly temporary and limited by the parameters of the artwork. Therefore, in terms of its social value, there was no explicit call to action or dissent in the work; instead the atmosphere was more akin to a utopian vision of sociability. While this alternative reality on display in the Serpentine might be

⁵⁹ It is unclear how Abramović knows the background of the participants, although, as discussed in chapter four, the artist did take the time to talk to attendees in the cloakroom after their experience. Nevertheless, the way in which she has chosen to describe participants can be seen as reductive.

its own call to action, it might also be viewed as masking social fragmentation (Gritzner 2011: 109). In addition, the state of mindfulness cultivated in the piece and the insistence that we lock away our everyday lives would appear to prioritise individual experience over collective consciousness. As Machon identifies,⁶⁰ there needs to be “attendant” presence in participatory practice and not just participants in attendance (Machon 2016). However, an inability to forget my responsibilities, particularly as a mother, made it difficult for me to fully “attend” the event. While I was being invited to communicate and engage with those inside the gallery walls, it felt wrong to deny the presence of those outside.

Building on from the notion of social value, I will return once more to the creation of community within participatory performance. Similar to La Pocha Nostra’s practice, and given the durational and come-and-go structure of the event, the communities that develop during *512 Hours* tend to be transient. However, one exception is the group of expert participant-spectators whose attendance establishes a collective consciousness through their mutual recognition of expertness. Over the course of my encountering of *512 Hours* I spotted a number of these expert participants. The first sighting was a young male who queue jumped and was given immediate access to the exhibition, in a manner reminiscent of the VIP guest list of the superclubs of the 2000s. Indeed, his attire would not have looked out of place as one of the fashionistas working the door: tall, beautiful and heavily made up - wearing all black including a head snood, with the exception of a pair of bright pink brogues. He remained present in the performance throughout my visit, and spent most of his time at the centre of the platform. At one

⁶⁰ Machon draws on Stephen Di Benedetto's usage of the term “attendant”. See Di Benedetto (2007: 126).

point I observed him watching from the sidelines, when Abramović appeared and a knowing exchange resulted in him resuming his place on the front line of meditation. Here we see the artist making use of the spectator's expertise to maintain the energy of the piece. Another expert participant-spectator that I witnessed was a middle-aged woman who was clearly in the experience for the long-haul. She was wearing her slippers, and later appeared with a scarf tied around her eyes and a blanket that she had brought along. She appeared to be fully compliant with the tasks and there were no necessary reminders from assistants that she should close her eyes (the scarf would see to that). She appeared at home in the gallery space, and I wondered how many times she had visited and what she had gained in return.

A further community constituted during *512 Hours* was those gathered in the queue outside. I recall a feeling of camaraderie with those closest to me in the line; people saved each other's place during tea runs and made small talk about the wait. Abramović reflects that on the last day of *512 Hours* the queuing crowd outside decided to stay even when they were told that they probably wouldn't gain entry, as they wanted to be part of the experience and recognised that "waiting is a part of that" (KunstSpektrum 2014). However, the group can also be seen to echo a social structure where there are those waiting to get in, with no clear indication of when that might be because it is dependent on someone else's choice to leave. In this way, a fair democratic experience of art might be seen as something to be earned and with a limited capacity, rather than instantly obtainable. Once inside the gallery, there is an automatic sense of achievement having endured the tedium of waiting, I am determined to get the most out of my encounter, after all, haven't I earned it! An alternative perspective on the queue outside is that it is knowingly controlled, mirroring another tactic found in club-culture where

the queue is allowed to build up in order to attract more people. This tactic would also support Harvie's notion of participatory performance as a spectacle of social engagement (2013: 3).

4.4 Attending to Agency

In the last section, we looked at the cultural, consumer and social value attributed to participation in *512 Hours*. However, to better understand whether the performance offered a genuine experiment in sociability or 'a spectacle of communication and social engagement' (Harvie 2013: 3), it is essential that we consider the agency afforded to the audience. Astrid Breel, referencing Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi (2008), establishes that '[i]n participatory performance, agency can be said to derive from three aspects: the intentional aspect, the bodily sensation, and the reflective attribution' (2015: 374).

Starting with intention; for a participant to have agency they must have the capacity to make a creative contribution to the work and to make choices. Discussing the role of the audience, Abramović says: "[t]hey are arriving into the space with nothing. I'm there for them. They are my living material. I'm their living material. And from this nothing, something may or may not happen" (Serpentine Galleries, 2015). Yet, despite the agency that is implied within this statement, my encountering of the piece revealed as many restrictions as there were choices, which included "no talking" and "close your eyes". Mary Richards in her book *Marina Abramović* (2010) suggests that these kinds of statements 'ask the viewer to enter and engage in a particular sort of way. The instructions are not completely open-ended but are designed to push the participant to focus in predetermined sorts of ways' (2010: 55). Therefore, it could be said that *512 Hours* offers the display of agency, rather than a truly agential experience. Still, at the same time, the spectator was able to select their activity, to watch or do, and ultimately

to decide when to leave the performance, albeit under the close supervision of Abramović's assistants.

According to Breel, '[a]gency is based in perception, which locates it inside our individual experience of the world. This means that offering someone agency, such as within participatory performance, does not automatically translate into them perceiving agency' (2015: 374). Speaking about the spectator's role in *512 Hours*, Abramović insists:

You are not forced... there is nothing here that you have to do like when you come to the Serpentine Gallery you can just observe if you want and do nothing of this, or you can do everything and then observe others, so that freedom is very very important. (KunstSpektrum 2014)

However, this was not my perception. Furthermore, Laura Cumming's review in *The Observer* attests to the way in which the experience could be punishing rather than emancipating. She describes how:

Abramović, or one of the assistants, singles you out of the crowd and moves you around the gallery. She does this by taking your hand and drawing you slowly but firmly along like a naughty child until an appropriate spot is found. There you are stationed – facing the wall, in my case, in punishment position – and left to remain. That this is meant to be Zen seemed implicit in the instructions Abramović mouthed in my ear. "Relax," she says, taking my shoulders in her strenuous grip. I don't feel like relaxing. A minute passes. "Breathe!" she insists. Not on your orders, lady (2014)

Over the few hours in which I remained in *512 Hours*, I was encouraged to engage in a variety of exercises. This included another attempt to commit me to the platform; however, this was again in conflict with my desire to observe, as well as an inability to turn off my mind. Although Abramović asserts that the audience "are arriving into the space with nothing" (Serpentine Galleries, 2015), I suggest that while our mobile phones may be off limits, our status exists beyond our Facebook update. As Adrian Searle puts it in his review for *The Guardian*: 'There is never nothing, always

something. Thoughts of bills to pay and world peace. Sexual fantasy, should I try Botox, and did I leave the iron on? It is hard to be in the moment. Harder to leave the self behind' (2014). As I sat on a chair, trying my best to empty my mind, I received some light shoulder manipulation by one of the helpers, who gestured that I should close my eyes. On another occasion, I was guided to walk backwards holding hands with a fellow spectator. Nevertheless, although this was a thoughtful experience, I couldn't quite forget the watching-spectators and the potential for doing it too quick/too slow/not right. Indeed, the persistent encouragement of spectators to participate in the activities might be as much about limiting the number of bystanders as it is about activating the audience. While my reflection indicates that I found my experience to be more restricting than moving, I was struck by the profound affect that the work had on some audience members. These moments included a young woman in a grey tea dress completing the walk backwards, at which point she hugged her walking partner very closely and began to cry. I also observed a middle-aged man in a red gingham shirt meditating on the platform, slowly doubling over as if gravity was pulling him down. Following Breel, in all of these instances, an embodied sensation of agency was depicted by the spectators through a notable change in their physicality. And, this in turn was witnessed by the other audience members, therefore, affecting the aesthetic experience as a whole.

Breel maintains that coding agency offers a way of analysing the kind of participation that is on offer within a work. She identifies three modes of agency, which closely relate to Pelias and VanOosting's (1987) continuum of levels of participation discussed in chapter two. These are: Reactive – answering a question, or responding to a trigger, command or request; Interactive – completing a task or undertaking an activity

or conversation that involves mutual engagement; Pro-active – displaying self-initiated behavior, which may bring consequences outside of the predetermined structure of the performance (Breel 2015: 375, 381). In *512 Hours* the spectator is for the most part offered both reactive and interactive levels of agency, as they are asked to respond to the instructions given by the artist and her team, and to engage with others in the given exercises. Yet, there were moments of self-initiated action, such as the unprompted hug and tears demonstrated by the young woman in the grey tea dress and her walking partner. However, although this was not pre-determined, it was still within the realms of what could reasonably be expected as an outcome of intensive self-reflective practice. During my time in the installation, I did not feel inclined to carry out any pro-active acts of agency, due to the limited set of activities being promoted in the work. Breel notes that due to its disruptive and subversive potential, '[a]rguably, only an act of Pro-active agency is a truly "free" expression of agency'; yet, she also recognises that 'this may be less meaningful in the context of the work than an action taken within the structure of the performance' (2015: 381). Therefore, while spectators of *512 Hours* are not wholly emancipated, as their agency is limited to clearly defined and monitored parameters, it is also conceivable that those imposed boundaries actually serve to bring the public together. In this way, as Breel's audience research demonstrates, the level of agency is not consistent with how meaningful participation is for the spectator (2015: 378). To this end, the simple act of holding hands with a stranger, with the awkwardness that direct relational contact imbues, can produce a powerful experience. This is especially true if these two strangers happen to be a person from Gaza and Palestine, whereupon holding hands becomes a political act of resistance.

Stevens maintains that you don't change people; rather you give a space for people to change for themselves (Stevens 2016). In this way, although Abramović's most recent participatory offering might not stage the kind of "antagonism" called upon by Bishop, or extend social engagement beyond the walls of the gallery, it does enable 512 Hours of space for people to experience change. Certainly, there are many accounts by spectators on both Tumblr and Twitter that testify to it being 'transcendental' or a 'life-changing' experience (see 512 Hours Tumblr (2014) and #512hours on Twitter). It is worth acknowledging the immediacy of the responses captured on social media, as the ease of access in the age of the smartphone means that reflection can be shared when the experience is still fresh. At the same time social media is premised on a form of communication that transforms experience into a sound bite, most notably as a Facebook update or tweet. Therefore, it is important to recognise that the accounts given on these platforms are partly framed by a superficial culture of self-promotion, which corresponds to the "bragging rights" of "I was there" that I discussed earlier.

In developing my analysis of audience agency, I wish to consider the way that Abramović affected audience behaviour. After a period of sitting in the cloakroom and talking to visitors about their experience, the artist returned to the performance. However, there was a palpable shift in energy when Abramović entered the room. I witnessed one instance in the space where my companion⁶¹ was seated; a silent space where participants were either encouraged to occupy one of the seats and close their eyes or to slow motion walk. When the recognisable figure of Abramović entered the room and whispered to my friend to "close her eyes", the gallery was scarcely

⁶¹ In *512 Hours* my attendance with a companion embodied the binary of together and alone, discussed by Simon Jones (2012), as we arrived together but were separated by the experience, while never fully forgetting our togetherness.

populated; but, by the time that she opened them some five minutes later the room was full. Similarly, I saw a notable increase in the number of participants meditating on the platform after Abramović's return. Therefore, in contrast to conventional forms of performance, the audience appeared to be performing for the artist. Yet, while this manifests the role-reversal of artist and audience identified by Fischer-Lichte, the artist retained her authority throughout. During my attendance at *512 Hours*, I perceived a largely compliant and in some instances devoted group of spectators, rather than an emancipated audience. The artist's influence was undeniable; from the lengthy queues that stretched outside the Serpentine, to people's willingness to cede their will to Abramović's commands. As she reflects:

[A]t the end of the day there would be hundreds of people come and stand. Just together. They would never be there together in normal life, in different religion[s], different social groups, different ages – they just stand. It was [a] really moving experience. For me this changed everything. (KunstSpektrum 2014)

Consequently, while my examination challenges Abramović's claims about the work, particularly the extent to which it offers freedom to spectators, the impact of the experience on some participants cannot be underestimated.

4.5 The Presence of Risk

In the next part of the argument I will discuss how the implied risks of staging Abramović's public experiment produces a preliminary form of presence that plays an important function in fostering participation. As Alston notes, citing David Jubb, the artistic director of the Battersea Arts Centre:⁶²

[R]isk is central to many participatory and immersive experiences: There is first of all the risk of not understanding the protocols of a given theatrical practice; there is also the risk of participatory rules being unclear ... there exists a tension

⁶²The Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) is a leading venue in participatory performance programming.

between risk and chaos that is key to navigating participatory risks for audiences (Jubb 2012). I would add that the taking of participatory risks also relates to the production of affect and emotion. (2013: 134-135)

Furthermore, I am proposing that the perception of risk combined with a sense of not knowing yields greater nervousness and a heightened self-awareness in both the artist and participants' expectant bodies, which creates an intense form of presence.

Abramović reveals that, '*when I am performing a piece, anything that happens in that moment is part of the piece. You have to be open to accept it, and that has always been so nerve racking because you never know how things can go*' (cited in O'Brien 2014: 50 emphasis original). A relationship between the nervous system and being present is emphasised in Jane Goodall's *Stage Presence* (2008), focusing on dancer Nijinsky's⁶³ claim that '[o]ne must be nervous' (2008: 161). In her essay 'A Resonant Emptiness', Sophie O'Brien considers that '[t]he potential of failure inherent in Abramović's work functions to sharpen her physical and psychological presence in performance' (2014: 51). I suggest that the same can also be said of her co-performers: the spectators, whose presence is enhanced through their anticipation of the encounter. This expectancy resonates with the hedonistic and narcissistic desire that I discussed in chapter three, as these participatory impulses produce feelings of excitement and anxiety in the participants, with the promise of pleasure, as well as the threat of disaster. In the trailer for *512 Hours*, Abramović draws attention to the experimental nature of the work, in which "something may or may not happen" (Serpentine Galleries, 2015). Similarly, O'Brien muses that:

In the state of imminence before a live performance, we wait patiently amidst the residues of the past, inhabiting this present moment of anticipation and

⁶³ Vaslav Nijinsky (1890-1950) was a Russian ballet dancer and choreographer, who is regarded as the most famous male dancer of the early twentieth century. See Ramsay Burt's 2007 *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*, pp. 58-84. Also, see Hanna Järvinen's account of 'the stardom of Vaslav Nijinsky' (2014).

conjuring up an imagined future. In the case of Marina Abramović's ... *512 Hours*, we are here, prior to the work commencing, frozen in the moment before an important event ... and one for which there will be no script or plan. (2014: 15)

Indeed, I concede that in my imagining of *512 Hours* I remained too attached to the past, specifically Abramović's previous endurance-based works. Therefore, I was initially disappointed when I realised that she was not physically present in the performance for the entire duration.

Building on from the way that an emphasis on experimentation creates a level of anticipation in spectators, I will return to the significance of the white cube gallery, discussed in chapter three. Drawing on Bishop's cautionary essay, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', I propose that Abramović uses the "laboratory" paradigm to frame her practice (Bishop 2004: 51). As Bishop observes, there has been a notable tendency in the 2000s for European art venues to redefine the white cube model of exhibiting contemporary art as an experimental "laboratory" (2004: 51). This is certainly true in the case of the Marina Abramović Institute in Hudson, where visitors are even required to wear white laboratory coats. Bishop posits that this curatorial approach has emerged out a kind of art produced in the 1990s: 'work that is openended, interactive, and resistant to closure', which she perceives as 'a misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the interpretations of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art itself is argued to be in perpetual flux', and in her view this intentional instability can make the work impenetrable (Ibid., 52). It is at this juncture that Bishop's analysis converges with Harvie's reading of participation as complicit with a neoliberal capitalist culture. In discussing 'the ease with which the

“laboratory” becomes marketable as a space of leisure and entertainment’, Bishop notes that:

One could argue that in this context, project-based works-in-progress and artists-in-residence begin to dovetail with an “experience economy,” the marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences. Yet what the viewer is supposed to garner from such an “experience” of creativity, which is essentially institutionalized studio activity, is often unclear. (Ibid)

This argument relates to the earlier discussion concerning agency versus the display of agency and the extent to which participation is actually emancipatory and politically empowering as opposed to merely the spectacle of those endeavours.

To further unravel the presupposed risk and capacity for failure within *512 Hours*, I will now question what was really at stake in this performance. While the artist tells us that “she could not have had the confidence to do it before: to create something where there is nothing there” (KunstSpektrum 2014), I suggest that this statement can be challenged in a number of ways. First, the implication that she could not have done this before is somewhat misleading, as there are clear parallels between *512 Hours* and *The Abramović Method* (2012).⁶⁴ In the earlier experiment, participant-spectators were required to sign an agreement that they would stay in the installation without their mobile phones, iPods, computers, cameras and watches for a period of two hours. Abramović stated: ‘I have created an installation of objects for human and spirit use that the public can interact with in three basic positions: standing, sitting and lying down. In doing so, the public becomes part of the work’ (Abramović 2013: 19). Nevertheless, despite the similarities between the 2012 and 2015 works, it can be reasoned that the

⁶⁴ *The Abramović Method* (2012) was exhibited at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea (PAC) in Milan, curated by Diego Sileo and Eugenio Viola. It emerged from the artist's reflections on three of her most notorious works: *The House With the Ocean View* (2002), *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) and *The Artist is Present* (2010). It involves “the Abramović method” which is a training process designed to heighten the participants' consciousness of their physical and mental state in the present moment.

extended duration of *512 Hours* increases the potential for varying encounters and behaviours to unfold, which creates a greater perception of risk for both the artist and audience. As Alston establishes, risk assigns a close bond between the duration, unpredictability and daring of a participatory performance (2013: 134). Second, the “nothing there” can also be refuted, as I contend that in actuality there was quite a lot there, notably the platform and chairs, and earlier in the run there had been beds and rice counting. More significantly, I suggest that any impression of “nothing” being there is outweighed by the “something” of Abramović, and to this end “something” *will* happen. For even when she is absent, perhaps even more so, Abramović is present. Even though she may profess that “the public is [the] main work” (KunstSpektrum 2014), given her undeniable popularity it would be short sighted for her not to realise that for many people *she* is the subject/object of the art. Indeed, Abramović’s awareness of her fame is evident in the way that she uses her known presence to publicise her art, while also demonstrating a desire to be at the centre of the work.

Although the title of the piece suggests very little about the content of the art beyond its duration, once inside the gallery it is clear that a particular set of processes and a legion of assistants (56 in total – nine each day) have been selected for a specific purpose. However, notwithstanding that there are clear parameters for participation in place; the un-scripted nature of *512 Hours* inevitably brings with it a degree of unpredictability and the risk that something could go wrong.⁶⁵ Tim Etchells notes that

⁶⁵ In terms of what could go wrong, it is reasonable to consider the possibility of physical injury during the mindfulness exercises, especially given the sensory deprivation of spectators. Also, as I have noted, the effect of these activities had the potential to produce emotional and physiological reactions in spectators, which could put these individuals in a vulnerable state.

the performance of presence is located in this uncertainty and potential for failure, stating:

Being present is always a kind of construction. Perhaps we could think of presence as something that happens when one attempts to do something, and whilst attempting to do that thing you become visible; visible in not quite succeeding in doing it, visible through the cracks or the gaps. (Cited in Giannachi *et al*: 20)

In *512 Hours*, the emphasis is on the public as the work relies on their attempt to do something (even if that something is nothing) in order to give it form; therefore, the performance of presence becomes a necessary part of its constitution. The stark white gallery spaces of the Serpentine determine that there is no-where to hide, even those watching on the side-lines are perceptible. Yet, echoing Etchells, I observed that participants became even more visible when they were ‘attempting’ to do something. It is in the ‘attempt’ that the possibility of either success or failure is highlighted, as the ‘doing’ is indeterminate. This differs from more practiced or automatic modes of doing, which rely on memory and what Schechner calls “restored behaviour”,⁶⁶ where there is less attempt required. In essence, the more demanding participation is, the bigger the attempt needed and the greater the visibility of the performing spectator. In *512 Hours* spectators are asked to undertake prolonged ritual-based activities, which require a high degree of focus, precision and endurance, and to leave their everyday self in the cloak room. It was during the slow motion walk backwards exercise that I felt the most present, owing to the uncertainty implicit in the task and the possibility of getting it wrong in front of an audience. The superfans and expert participant-spectators, however, can to a certain extent defy this notion of ‘attempt’ through their familiarity

⁶⁶ See Schechner’s definition of “restored behaviour” in Schechner 2002: 29.

with the work. In this way, they provide an alternative performance of presence, one that is founded on proficiency, sureness and conviction.

Overall, I conclude that while the anticipation of risk heightened the self-presence of both artist and spectators, in reality the performance involved a fairly low-level of risk. This resulted from the mind-calming activities encouraged within the work, the management of the audience, and the devotion of Abramović's followers. The ultimate sign of failure for this public experiment would have been if the public had withheld its participation. However, the artist's popularity insured against this possibility, as evidenced in the long wait to gain admission.

4.6 Having Presence

The previous discussions on presence have been underpinned by spectators' prior knowledge of Abramović and her influence as a cultural figure. It is at this stage of the chapter that I take a close look at Abramović's relationship with her audience and the way that she manifests stage presence. Richards considers that for Abramović:

[T]he experience of the audience should be closer to what she experienced when she met with a monk who had just come out of seclusion following a number of years spent in a cave. ... an experience of great clarity where she 'just stopped thinking' (Abramović et al., 1998: 404). It is this deep sense of peaceful connectivity that Abramović sees as something art should strive for; inner power transferred from artist to spectator (Carr, 2002: 57). (2010: 108)

Since the start of her career, Abramović has drawn on her own autobiography, placing her body as both the subject and object of the work, and blurring the lines between life/art and public/private. As O'Brien writes:

Performance artists are experienced by the audience as a thing in a permanent state of becoming; like an initiate in a ritual, they are suspended in an in-between or liminal state during the work itself. Furthermore, beyond the immediacy of the work, Abramović occupies a complex state: she is between artist, celebrity and individual. (2014: 52)

Moreover, in her durational practice life is consumed by art, or at the very least radically altered by it, hence, the distinction between Abramović the artist and the person becomes increasingly difficult to place. This complicated notion of identity is epitomised by the artist's 2012 collaboration with Robert Wilson on *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, in which the artist played herself.

The notion of “playing one's self” is both inescapable and part of the draw in *512 Hours*, given the artist's celebrity status. It is worth highlighting that Abramović was listed in *Time* magazine's Top 100 Influential People in May 2014 (O'Brien 2014: 43). Her prominence amongst a mainstream audience has been actively pursued by the artist, in a bid to promote performance art to a broader public. The most notable examples of Abramović crossing over into popular culture include the restaging of *The House with the Ocean View* (2002) for an episode of *Sex & The City* (2003); her ongoing collaboration with Lady Gaga; the restaging of *The Artist is Present* in the pop video *Picasso Baby* for rapper Jay Z (2013); and recently her partnership with Adidas. While this has evidently given her many new followers, it has also induced much criticism that the artist has ‘sold out’. Jonathan Jones's article for *The Guardian*, ‘Jay Z v Marina Abramović: they both used each other’, accuses Abramović of using high profile pop collaborations ‘to beam her charisma to the masses and whip up a frenzy of adulation’ (2015). It discusses the way that she has cultivated a ‘totally new kind of artistic fame’ and refers to her ascent to pseudo-messianic glory, capable of seducing her star-struck fans to wait for hours just to be in her presence. Jones poignantly asks: ‘what is the cultural price of mass intoxication? Is it a good thing?’ (2015). I suggest that in the case of *512 Hours* this adulation establishes a special complicity with the practice even

before spectators have entered the gallery. This intoxication may also lessen spectators' inhibitions and make risk-taking more likely, especially as there is the potential for conversation and perhaps envy to be found. This is of course good for the gallery and good for the artist, especially given the significance placed on public engagement. However, being under the influence of Abramović may also limit critical judgement; consequently, the work may go unchallenged by the mainly compliant audience. Then again, as some of the reviews mentioned in this discussion have shown, Abramović does have her critics. In fact, the artist received intense criticism in 2016, following allegations of racism over comments about Indigenous Australians, written in a 1979 diary entry that featured in a draft of her forthcoming memoir (Harmon 2016).

I propose that having stage presence is integral to the development of participation in performance as it directly affects the artist's management of the audience. According to Patrice Pavis (1987):

‘To have presence’ in theatrical parlance, is to know how to capture the attention of the public and make an impression; it is also to be endowed with a *je ne sais quoi* which triggers an immediate feeling of identification in the spectator, communicating a sense of living elsewhere and in an eternal present. (1987:9)

Cormac Power's term “auratic presence” defines the mode of presence that I have alluded to in relation to Abramović's appeal. Power's concept derives from the term “aura”; although difficult to pin down and with mysterious connotations, it refers to a presence that is ‘above the ordinary’ (2008: 47). In this way, it coincides with Walter Benjamin's notion of “aura” in relation to the unique presence of an artwork (Benjamin 1999: 214). Central to auratic presence is a strong sense of charisma, which in modern day usage is expressed through the person as whole rather than as a particular talent. Goodall clarifies, referencing Max Weber:

The term charisma will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. (Weber 1968: 48 in Goodall 2008: 45)

Returning to Power's theory, there are two ways in which Abramović's auratic presence is manifested (2008: 47-49). Firstly, it is constructed through the celebrity of the artist and the expectations that spectators' carry with them into their encounter. As I reflected on earlier, these expectations have been built on the notoriety of Abramović's endurance-based and in some instances death defying artworks, therefore, correlating with Weber's notion of charisma as pertaining to superhuman qualities. Secondly, auratic presence shows itself in the doing of the performance, and not just through the artist's prior reputation. I suggest that Abramović exudes this second appearance in *512 Hours*, through her command of the performance space, and the way in which she addresses her audience and holds their attention.

To elucidate this second type of presence, I look once more to Erika Fischer-Lichte's writing, specifically her essay 'Appearing as embodied mind – defining a weak, a strong and a radical concept of presence' (2012). I suggest that in *512 Hours* spectators experience both a "strong concept" and "radical concept" of the artist's presence. In defining a strong concept of presence Fischer-Lichte refers to the actor's ability to command the space and to draw the spectators' total attention, she says:

Spectators sense a certain power emanating from the actor that forces them to focus their full consideration on him without feeling overwhelmed, perceiving it as a source of energy. The spectators sense that the actor is present in an unusually intense way, granting them, in turn, the intense sensation of themselves as present. To them, presence occurs as an intense experience of presentness. (Fischer-Lichte 2012: 108-109)

As I have already indicated, from the moment that Abramović walked back into the main gallery space of *512 Hours* there was a tangible shift in energy, as her presence

was acutely perceived by spectators. This was heightened by the unpredictability of her actions, as it was unknown where she would go or who she might engage with next. The performance of participation became more visible, as spectators appeared to make an extra effort or attempt to be involved, and spaces became a hub of activity when Abramović showed interest.

Following Fischer-Lichte's reading of Eugenio Barba's research, I offer that Abramović's strong sense of presence is 'a performative quality, brought forth by a particular usage made of the body' (Fischer-Lichte 2012: 110). Barba's extensive work on presence arose out of his own intense experiences as a spectator of Indian and Far Eastern theatre forms. His study concluded that the techniques and practices of these performers 'serve the purpose of generating energy within themselves, which then transfers to the spectator' (Fischer-Lichte 2012: 110). Similarly, "the Abramović method", used at the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI) in Hudson, New York, has its origins in the knowledge gained through the artists' expeditions around the world and learnings with Tibetan Monks, Aborigines, and Indian and Far Eastern practices. The underpinning principles of these exercises, which form the basis of *512 Hours*, are to enable the participant to control their perception, build their will power, and to concentrate on being in the present moment. As Richards observes:

Abramović continues to root many of the problems of contemporary Western Society in its lack of genuine connection, both to other people and to the larger cosmos. ... Everyone is too busy; caught up in the cycles of contemporary existence that reads inactivity as boredom or laziness. By contrast, Abramović is keen to advocate the importance of being free to do nothing in a society that seems to be repulsed by this idea. ... In this respect Abramović's ideas can be linked to particular processes associated with Taoism (2010: 56)

Abramović observes that in *512 Hours* "you turn into yourself" (KunstSpektrum 2014), which corresponds with Rachel Gomme's reflection on the way that participation

eventually becomes an encounter with the self (Gomme 2015: 291). Furthermore, I suggest that during this process of introversion, energy is produced within participants which can also emanate as the strong concept of presence (to varying degrees). The level of presence being emitted, results from several factors, noted by Phillip Zarrilli in his application of Fischer-Lichte's theory:

“[T]he strong concept of presence” is not singular but multiple: the quality, valence, and intensity of the actor's ability to generate an inner ‘energy,’ to engage one's entire embodied consciousness in each performance task, to command space and hold attention is always shaped by one's training/experience, as well as the dramaturgy and aesthetic of a specific performance. (Zarrilli 2012: 122)

This explains why there were some participants who appeared to be fully immersed and present in the exercises; and others including myself, who struggled to find the required level of concentration to be embodied in the tasks, therefore, appearing less present.

Reflecting on my own engagement with the work, although I understood what I needed to give in order to receive the transformative potential of the experience, it had been a long time since I had undertaken ritual-based and meditative processes and I found that I didn't have the required patience. Richards states that: ‘Abramović embraces “boredom” as a necessary stage through which you must pass in order to become creative. In “doing” nothing ... you can allow sufficient time and space for something to happen’ (2010: 56). However, I interpreted my boredom and lack of concentration as a failure, which contradicted my self-appointed expert participant-spectator status. Yet, while I suspect that I did not radiate a strong concept of presence, a form of “attendance” was manifested in my attempt to be present in the moment.

4.7 Embodied Presence

Along with the perceptions of auratic presence and stage presence already discussed, I also wish to draw attention to the notion of an embodied and sensorial concept of presence. To this end, I will continue to interpret Fischer-Lichte's hypothesis, as well as applying Machon's theory of "(syn)aesthetics", Cixous's writings on sensory perception and Cull's concept of "ontological participation". I propose that an embodied form of presence is essential to understanding the transmission of energy between participants in participatory live art, capable of determining "presence as co-presence". In addition, I also suggest that this particular experience of being in attendance is what distinguishes participatory works as particularly affective.

Echoing Barba, Fischer-Lichte's analysis of the strong concept of presence establishes that it is achieved through the actor's phenomenal body. She develops her reading to consider how this embodiment manifests when the phenomenal and the semiotic body of the actor are indistinguishable (Fischer-Lichte 2012: 111). Drawing on anthropologist Thomas Csórdas' (1994) appropriation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, as well as the writing of philosopher Helmuth Plessner (1970), Fischer-Lichte offers a theory of embodied presence in a constant state of emergence:

The human body knows no state of being, it exists only in a state of becoming. It recreates itself with every blink of the eye; every breath and every movement bring forth a new body. For that reason, the body is ultimately elusive. The bodily being-in-the-world, which cannot *be* but *becomes*, vehemently refuses to be declared a work of art, or to be made into one. The actor instead undergoes processes of embodiment that bring forth his body anew and, at the same time, a dramatic figure. (Ibid)

Nevertheless, Fischer-Lichte also acknowledges that embodied presence can be achieved without representing 'a dramatic figure', and in this way the definition is applicable to Abramović. Moreover, if we consider the idea of Marina Abramović

playing the celebrity-artist “Marina Abramović”, it follows that her presence is founded on both her phenomenal body and semiotic body. In her theorising, Fischer-Lichte contests the presupposition that presence happens when the body and the mind are brought together, insisting that the phenomenon of presence actually collapses the mind-body dichotomy. As discussed in chapter three, for Fischer-Lichte, when the performer exhibits the strong concept of presence through their phenomenal body, ‘the mind is embodied and the body is “en-minded”’ (Ibid., 16). In this way, presence is consistent with my outlining of a “symmathesy” of participation, to use Nora Bateson’s (2016) term.

A development of Fischer-Lichte’s strong concept of presence is her “radical concept of presence”, which determines a form of mutual determination between performer and spectator. It is underpinned by the argument that when the spectator encounters the performer’s strong concept of presence, they identify as an embodied mind within their own bodily presence. As Fischer-Lichte puts it:

Through the performer’s presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming – he perceives the circulating energy as a transformative and vital energy. This I call the radical concept of presence, written as PRESENCE: PRESENCE means appearing and being perceived as embodied mind; perceiving the PRESENCE of another means to also experience oneself as embodied mind. (2012: 115)

In *512 Hours* the mutual determination of ‘becoming’ is tangible, as spectators experience varying degrees of transformation in both themselves and others. I suggest that PRESENCE: PRESENCE, with the double of ‘appearing and being perceived as embodied mind’, is magnified by the paradox of participation in *512 Hours*, in which the spectator is simultaneously the performer.

Freddie Rokem's (2003) writing on "transgressive energies" in performance also alludes to a radical concept of presence, which can manifest in watching-spectators. Rokem gives the example of an audience member identifying with the presence of an eavesdropper in a Shakespearean play, who is chastised for his transgression. In this moment, aware that their spectating is also a form of eavesdropping, the audience member establishes a process of recognition with the body of the performing spy, who they perceive as an extension of themselves. Applying this concept to *512 Hours*, when a watching-spectator observes a performing-spectator being whispered to or touched by Abramović, a doubling process begins. Furthermore, the watcher, recognising their mutual audience-ness with the performing-spectator, is induced to make a largely unconscious negotiation with themselves, based on a range of emotional and cathartic responses (Rokem 2003: 306-307), as outlined in chapter three. This resonates with my empathetic experience seeing Abramović instruct my companion to "close her eyes", tinged with a little jealousy. Shortly after leaving the gallery, my friend made a point of telling me about her momentary one-to-one encounter, saying: "Marina whispered to me". I am reminded of the potential for participation to be socially divisive, through its privileging of some spectators over others. However, perhaps, as Alston suggests, this 'uneven distribution of participatory opportunity is what may well render an experience ... especially meaningful or exciting' (2013: 133). Furthermore, according to Bruce McConachie's 'cognitive analysis of spectating in the theatre', mirror neuron systems cause the spectator to mirror and empathise with others, and it is this that maintains their interest in the unfolding narrative/sequence of events (McConachie, 2009: 18-19).

Fischer-Lichte proposes that a heightened awareness of one's own presence as manifested through PRESENCE: PRESENCE achieves a rare moment of happiness that

cannot be recreated in the audience member's everyday life, consequently, 'spectators might become addicted' (2012: 116). She notes, referencing philosopher Martin Seel, that 'we yearn for a sense of the presence of our life' and 'want to experience the presences in which we exist as sensual presences' (Seel 2001: 53 in Fischer-Lichte 2012: 115-116). To this end, PRESENCE: PRESENCE may go some way in explaining the rising popularity of more visceral art forms, and the emergence of superfans and expert participant-spectators, who seek to recreate their experience time and time again.

Developing on from Fischer-Lichte's concept of "embodied presence", there are several points of comparison to be found with Machon's theory of "(Syn)aesthetics" (2009), especially her analysis of the "presentness" of sensorial practice. Machon's redefining of visceral performance: 'encompasses both a fused sensory perceptual experience and a fused sensate approach to artistic practice and analysis' (2009: 14 emphasis original). Consequently, she adopts Elaine Scarry's derivation of presence: *prae-sens*, meaning 'that which stands before the senses' (Scarry 1985: 197; emphasis original, in Machon 2009: 25). According to Machon, '[f]undamental to the (syn)aesthetic response is the notion that the body is the sentient conduit for the appreciation of artistic work in general, and performance in particular' (2009: 22). I propose that this concept is accentuated in *512 Hours*, with its emphasis on an embodied and individual experience. In addition, the spectator's experience of the performance represents a departure from typical gallery behavior, where appreciation of the art is largely based on visual perception. This is resulting from the way that each activity demands that the spectator remains in the same space for a prolonged period, limiting their mobility; and coupled with an emphasis on participation rather than observation. Therefore, instead of objectively measuring the work against a set of

recognisable visible qualities; the spectator is forced to re-configure their response to the experience. To this end, the wholeness of the spectator's experience does not derive from 'seeing' the whole event unfold, but from (syn)aesthetic perception. As Merleau-Ponty maintains, 'sensory perception' is produced 'with our whole body all at once, and which opens on a world of interacting senses' (2002 [1962]: 255). This is further enhanced in *512 Hours* given the restrictions imposed on our sensory perception. On the platform, with eyes shut and ears closed off, I can no longer rely on my dominant senses, rather I 'turn' into myself and perceive with my whole body. Stephen Di Benedetto maintains that '[a]rtists who harness more than our eyes and ears encourage us to wake up, to be alert to the world around us ... It is an invitation to live, to feel, and to be part of a larger community' (2007: 134). In this way, Abramović's method of participation can be seen to bring forth a heightened sense of "presentness" in both the self and others that works towards fostering social engagement.

Machon's theorising also converges with Fischer-Lichte's observation that an embodied sense of one's own presence can be addictive. Drawing on neurologist Richard E. Cytowic (1994, 2002) and psychologist Alexander Luria's (1969) research into "hypermnesia", Machon maintains that fundamental to (syn)aesthetics is the idea that 'the original visceral experience remains affective in any subsequent recall' (2009: 10 emphasis original). This embodied recalling strengthens our experience, perhaps making it even more palpable than in its original perception. It upholds the addictive potential of participatory practice, as each time we have an experience it is enriched with our previous exchanges. When we have repeated experiences of the same work, as is the case with Punchdrunk's superfans, our reactivated encountering has even greater affective clarity. This utterance of a past presence affords the participant a heightened

presence in the presentness of the work. I also suggest that documentation can be a way of enabling us to relive our participatory experience, through the document performance of photographs and video footage, and in the re-telling of our encounter on social networks and blogs.

Acknowledging that Machon's theory of (syn)aesthetics is influenced by *écriture féminine*, it follows that her reading of embodied presence is consistent with Hélène Cixous's writings on sensory perception. A striking example of Cixous's theorising on embodied experience lies in her reflection on the myth of Eden (1991: 136-181). Here, she recognises the pleasure to be found eating the forbidden apple by stating: "Bring me to your lips"; it is full, it has an *inside*' (Cixous 1991: 151 emphasis original). In a way that parallels Eve and the apple, I suggest that when a participant-spectator comes to physically experience the inside of a performance, both the inside of the participant and the performance (apple) feel full; notwithstanding that the participant may feel empty later. Echoing Merleau-Ponty's (1968) writing on the "visible and tangible", Cixous's concept that the "eyes are lips" also suggests that the inside can be tasted by watching-spectators (Cixous 2001: 9).

Another theoretical viewpoint on embodied presence arises in Laura Cull's notion of "ontological participation", highlighted in chapter two. Her adoption of Allan Kaprow's conception that through participation '[m]eaning is experienced in the body, and the mind is set into play by the body's sensations' (Kaprow 1986 in Cull 2011: 86) corresponds to both Fischer-Lichte's concept of "PRESENCE: PRESENCE" and Machon's appropriation of "Prae-sens". Reflecting on Cull's theory, I propose that the underpinning philosophy and form of attention in action that is cultivated in *512 Hours*

works towards accessing ‘that extra-conscious perception’ that Cull envisages (Cull 2011: 87). However, as I have discussed, an inability to disable a mind/body duality, exasperated by the paradox of participation and a resistance to quieten my critical consciousness, meant that an immanent encounter eluded me. Nevertheless, I suggest that ontological participation offers a useful framework for understanding how embodied presence is brought into being during participatory performance.

4.8 Presence and Black Holes

Expanding on the notion that the experience of participation continues beyond the time and space in which it was first encountered, this discussion serves to recognise how the extended duration of *512 Hours* enables varying mutations of being present to emerge. As Abramović retrospectively describes in relation to her collaborative performance *Nightsea Crossing*⁶⁷ (1981-1987):

*Presence.
Being present, over long stretches of time,
Until presence rises and falls, from
Material to immaterial, from
Form to formless, from
Instrumental to mental, from
Time to timeless.*

(Cited in O’Brien 2014: 28 emphasis original)

Applying this formulation of *presence* to *512 Hours*, one might exchange the term *presence* with participation, while acknowledging that the two concepts are inextricably connected. I would argue that like presence, it is difficult to sustain precisely the same level of participation for any period of time, but this is even more evident where lengthy works are concerned. Abramović notes that during *512 Hours* some members of the

⁶⁷ *Nightsea Crossing* is comprised of twenty-two performances that took place in different locations around the world between 1981 and 1987. It involved Abramović and Ulay sitting at a table across from each other in silence for a period of seven hours a day.

public “would not leave” and were “staying for many hours” (KunstSpektrum 2014). Over the course of the performance, perceptions of presence and levels of participation inevitably fluctuate, along with shifts in the spectator’s role as both an audience member and performer. With regard to the movement from *time* to *timeless* in presence, I wish to propose that both concepts co-exist in the moment of participation. When participating we are in the present *time*: there is no past and no future, the *time* is now. Equally, because we are ‘doing’ something in the present, we cannot think of *time*, our presence and participation is *timeless*. When we stop participating and are no longer present in the work, we remember *time* again. Whereupon, we think of our watches concealed in the locker room and wonder if it is *time* to pay those bills, try Botox, check on the iron; *time* to find our everyday self again.

As O’Brien observes, Abramović’s postmillennial works are ‘about making time, about creating a conscious awareness and about responding to the audience’ (2014: 29). This was evident in the *House with the Ocean View* (2002), creating a space for New Yorkers to reflect post 9/11 and inviting them to engage in an energy exchange with the artist. Similarly, the intention behind her infamous *The Artist is Present* (2012), a development of *Nightsea Crossing*, was to make time to be ‘fully present’, so that she could ‘give out unconditional love to every stranger’ that sat down opposite her (Brookes 2014). In *512 Hours* she goes a step further, by not just asking her audience to make time, but to leave their established perception of time behind all together. In this way, as O’Brien asserts, ‘Abramović pushes to create “black holes”, where the audience can experience the depth of time. This shared experience charges the space with psychological and emotional complexities, an energy that is constantly shifting shape and dynamics’ (2014: 29). I propose that participation is part of the formation of these

black holes, as it transports the spectator into a time of timelessness. Furthermore, drawing on Cull's theory, it could be said that Abramović is attempting to manifest ontological participation by collapsing reality into the single dimension of *512 Hours* which denies the existence of our lives outside. What is interesting about the reference to black holes in space is that scientists can't see them, rather the existence of a hole is inferred by the effect that it has on its surroundings. I suggest that this observational problem can also be said of presence, as an 'emergent and processual phenomena' (Giannachi *et al* 2012: 14) that becomes visible through its influencing power.

Abramović's ability to channel energy is emphasised in Richards' analysis of her distinctive presence, noting that:

One of the extraordinary things about Abramović is her apparent ability to generate and focus her own electromagnetic field during her demanding durational performances. While it is not currently possible to provide definite evidence of what happens in the performance space, numerous accounts of audience members' experience of her in performance strongly suggest that the space, over time, becomes charged by Abramović's presence. (2010: 53)

This statement resonates with Goodall's writing on "drawing power", which establishes that Benjamin Franklin's theories of electricity have been applied to elaborate the notion of presence in an actor as accumulated charge. As Goodall states: 'He divided bodies into those "wanting" electrical fluid and those "abounding" with it. Where too much electricity was present, it pooled to form a charged electrical atmosphere' (2008: 81). This is actualised in the way that, as Abramović puts it: '*The public become like an energy field around me*' (cited in O'Brien 2014: 34 emphasis original). In addition, Abramović's use of ritual-based activities to be undertaken by participants is part of the creation of this energy field, underpinned by the belief that repetition 'generates enormous power' (Ibid., 35). The purpose of the energy field reverberates in two ways

with the constitution of presence in her work. First, it connects to the notion of *time* and *timelessness*, as the artist notes: ‘the space has to be charged differently so you lose this concept of time and it is really now, here and now, just here and now ... it’s as if it expresses something that goes on forever’ (Ibid). This supports the composition of presence as an evolving entity, rather than as a fixed construct. The second way in which the public acts as an energy field to foster presence is through their co-presence or “PRESENCE: PRESENCE”, to use Fischer-Lichte’s term, with Abramović. As the artist maintains: ‘*they can project onto me like a mirror*’ (cited in O’Brien 2014: 34 emphasis original).

4.9 The Phenomenology of Co-presence in Participation

In the previous discussions on concepts of presence, I have at various stages intimated how presence can also manifest as co-presence. It is at this juncture that I wish to open out that argument more fully, by engaging with the philosophical ideas of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. In doing so, I make considerable use of Simon Jones’s essay ‘Out-standing standing within: Being alone together in the work of Bodies of Flight’⁶⁸ (2012), which offers a rare insight into the way in which presence manifests in participatory live art. Inspired by the writings of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas, Simon Jones provides the scaffold for a phenomenological analysis of presence as co-presence through the lens of participation.

I will begin by unraveling how presence is constructed according to Heidegger and Levinas, as read by Jones. Heidegger uses the term “Dasein” to distinguish what I am referring to as presence. The essence of the noun “Dasein” means ‘being there or ‘being

⁶⁸ Bodies of Flight are a contemporary performance company founded by Simon Jones in 1990.

here’; corresponding to my assertion that presence has an indeterminate makeup and capacity for possibility. It is this perspective that underpins Heidegger’s analysis of the potential processes and mutations that may occur in one’s being. Yet, in spite of its transformative capacity, Heidegger establishes that presence is embodied, rather than existing as a disembodied state or in a different type of form. Still, while inextricably bound together, for Heidegger, presence is given primacy over the physical body. That being said, it is the inevitable demise of the body that presents the main challenge to Heidegger’s ontology, as he puts it: ‘Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Thus death reveals itself as that *possibility which is one’s ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped*’ (Heidegger 1962: 294 in S. Jones 2012: 162 emphasis original). Accordingly, Jones notes that the ontological isolation of each person as defined by the individual’s relation to their own death, undoes the relational potential of performance: ‘this co-presence can preserve nothing but the impossibility of its own becoming’ (S. Jones 2012: 162). In light of this sobering contention, Jones turns to Levinas’s amendment to Heidegger’s ontology, to establish that performance finds its particular potential in: ‘the participation of the other in this problem of the person’ (Ibid). For Levinas, presence is determined during the embodied encounter between two persons, whereupon we recognise the totality of humanity and its infinity (with all the possibilities that it imbues). As he succinctly puts it: ‘The thou is posited in front of a we’; consequently, performance offers a literal incarnation of Levinas’s theory (Levinas 1969: 213 in S. Jones 2012: 162).

The significance of co-presence is evident in the structure for *512 Hours*, as a piece made to accommodate 160 persons at any one time, as well as the relational dimension of the activities for participation. I will now turn to Heidegger’s concept of “out-

standing standing-within” (1978) interpreted by Jones, to provide a framework for discerning the way that *512 Hours* ‘poses this problem of the other before each other: two others mutually recognizing the other othering’ (S. Jones 2012: 170). For Heidegger the inter-relationship between the art and its spectators is where the art really happens: in its ‘preserving’ by those who did not author the work (S. Jones 2012: 158-159). Heidegger states:

Preserving the work means standing within the openness of beings that happens in the work. This ‘standing-within’ of preservation, however, is a knowing ... He who truly knows beings knows what he will do in the midst of them. [...] [T]he essence of *Existenz* is out-standing standing-within the essential sunderance of the clearing of beings. (Heidegger 1978: 192 in S. Jones 2012: 159)

I propose that the platform in *512 Hours* exemplifies the notion of “out-standing standing-within” as a form of ‘knowing’, while paradoxically constituting a ‘not-knowing’. Jones considers that:

the precise definition of ‘knowing’ is also one of difference, of standing out in the crowd, of recognising that this very inbetween, across which we come together, is also a gap that divides us, an incomplete medium, or rather, a bundling media (middles) each with their very own incompleteness ... So, this ‘knowing’ jointly sustains an attending to not-knowing or the issue of knowing, that is, performance’s quintessential work – *the problem of the person*. (2012: 159 emphasis original)

This issue of knowing is epitomised by the way that the platform physically brings different people face-to-face, but at the same time the incompleteness of the knowing turns inwards; thus, the exchange becomes ultimately one with the self. This analysis echoes Gomme’s adoption of Levinas’s theory that ‘the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery’, discussed in chapter three (Levinas 1987: 75-76 in Gomme 2015: 290).

Nevertheless, I am also reminded of Fischer-Lichte's (2008) argument that in the 'mutual physical contact' between performers and spectators 'the border turns into a frontier and a threshold, which does not separate but connects' (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 204). While, I have detailed *the problem of the person* in my own encountering, at the same time I suggest that the knowing that results from participation, albeit limited, encourages a greater understanding of the other and as a consequence, the self. In Figure 10 we can see a literal representation of bodies touching, as two young women are holding hands and Abramović has her hand on the shoulder of a young boy; however, Merleau-Ponty's notion that sensory experience is achieved with the whole body (2002 [1962]: 255) suggests that knowing can also manifest in those not touching, through their embodied perception. Therefore, the watching-spectator who is "out-standing" the "out-standing standing-within" of the performing-spectator may also experience a heightened awareness of self-presence which constitutes its own form of "standing-within". Looking at the relationship between not-knowing and knowing through the framework of "sympathesy", I propose that these two conditions are mutually-determining and underpin the process of identification that pertains to the presence of the self and other.

A further appearance of out-standing standing-within relates to the paradox of participation: the duality of being both performer and spectator at the same time, as a kind of co-presence within the self. This argument is supported by the recognition that we recognise our spectator role when we are participating and our performing self when we are watching because of the other's alterity, which we know as both outside of our self (out-standing) and deeply implicated in the self (standing-within). Abramović notes how:

(When we are in-between), this is where our mind is the most open. We are alert, sensitive, and destiny can happen. We do not have barriers and we are vulnerable. Vulnerability is important. It means we are completely alive and that is an extremely important space. This is for me the space from which my work generates. (Cited in O'Brien 2014: 51 emphasis original)

Therefore, the way that the spectator oscillates between seeing and doing in *512 Hours* works towards the creation of an in-between state, which fosters a heightened form of self-presence.

This concept of “out-standing standing-within” also correlates with Heidegger’s hypothesis of “neighboring nearness” (1971), as discussed by Giannachi, Kaye and Shanks (2012), which imagines that: ‘[n]eighborhood, then, is a relation resulting from the fact that the one settles face-to-face with the other. ... drawn into the other’s nearness’ (Heidegger 1971: 82 in Giannachi *et al* 2012: 10). The way that “neighboring nearness” establishes ‘the persistence of “being” across division and differentiation’ (Giannachi *et al* 2012: 11) can be applied to *512 Hours*, as a space where people from different walks of life and cultural backgrounds can “be together but at the same time with themselves” (Abramović in KunstSpektrum 2014). It also joins with Abramović’s utterance of co-presence as a *mirror* image, emblematic of the spectator being drawn into the artist’s nearness, as a form of mutual determination. At the same time her statement that they ‘*project onto me*’ (cited in O’Brien 2014: 34 emphasis original) speaks to Abramović’s purported capacity to “feel every single person” which she has emphasised in numerous interviews, arguably contributing to her own mythology (KunstSpektrum 2014; also Studio International 2014).

The realisation of neighboring nearness in *512 Hours* is part of a deliberate resistance to our reliance on technological modes of engagement and sociability, and their drive

for immediacy. Abramović declares that “[w]e are consumption junkies ... fucked up with technology ... we have to go back to simplicity” (KunstSpektrum 2014). Earlier in the chapter I highlighted the significance of time on the manifestation of presence; in this section, I will expand on that discussion against the backdrop of the immediacy perpetuated by contemporary culture and through a phenomenological critical framework. Jones notes that the instantaneous responses that we have come to expect through our online interactions ‘lends to any exchange the force of a *presence*’ (S. Jones 2012: 155 emphasis original), while obscuring encounters that cannot be revealed with the same level of promptness. He maintains that:

This instant gratification reinforces not only ‘the need for speed,’ but the sense of belonging inherent in the response made ... I exist because I am interacting: to tweet or not to tweet, that is the question. The interactive appears to accelerate time and condense space: a self-fulfilling immediacy with all the force of touch, without a space between, without a channel or medium – *im-mediate*. (Ibid., emphasis original)

It is, perhaps, this desire to continue to exist through interaction that provides the impulse for participants to share their experiences on Tumblr and Twitter. However, while Abramović’s uptake of Tumblr would appear to embrace the immediacy of online communication platforms, this is in contrast to the dogma of *512 Hours* to slow down time. Separated from their time keeping devices, spectators are encouraged to make time to be present. Additionally, the elimination of clock-time can be seen to deny a definitive chronology of bodies passing time, and the inevitability of death. In this way, the singularity of the spectator’s own presence, with its impending death which undoes Dasein/presence, is exchanged for an essential co-presence that is experienced as an embodied and infinite facing. However, as I determined in my earlier reflection on *512 Hours*, time became even more present as a consequence of its absence. Moreover,

while the performance may deny the passing of time and our eventual demise, the galleries closing time of 6pm acts as a constant reminder of the reality of time outside.

The notion of co-presence as an infinite facing is underpinned by Levinas's writing on "the infinity of the Other", interpreted by Jones as:

a process of appearing, dis-appearing and re-appearing, inherent in the movement towards, thence away from, and re-turning back towards, the other. This movement ... fundamental to appearance, appearing before the other, even appearing on stage, necessitates instability, un-doing and re-doing in its insistence on the dynamics of approaching the other, a touching without ever reaching, always underway and never undergone, always in action and never done. (S. Jones 2012: 164)

The implied processual and emergent nature of co-presence is exemplified in *512 Hours*, as the *face-to-face* encounters with others are transient meetings that limit the possibility of thinking and feeling the other as wholly there. This is a consequence of the artwork's ephemeral nature and the endlessness implied in its essential formlessness and extended duration. Nonetheless, this does not negate the meaningfulness of those encounters, no matter how fleeting or incomplete they may be. According to Jones these *face-to-face* encounters work in opposition to technological forms of participation in which '[t]o inter-act with the other becomes a tasking, rather than a being-with' (S. Jones 2012: 156). As such, he borrows Levinas's principle that: '[t]he immediate is the face-to-face' (Levinas 1969: 52 in S. Jones 2012: 157-158). For Jones, it is the inherent potential of a *face-to-face* encounter that upholds "live" performance's defiance towards interactive technologies (2012: 158). However, it is worth noting that for Levinas the constitution of presence as *face-to-face* is not limited to a literal encounter, as he states:

The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. (Levinas 1969: 50-1 in S. Jones 2012: 163 emphasis original)

Still, alternative relational modes of co-presence would need to yield the same potentiality of being (S. Jones 2012: 163). Incidentally, Stevens also asserts that mediated interaction, such as a series of heated text messages, can be more “live” than a banal face-to-face meeting (Stevens 2016). Even so, I suggest that it is spectators’ “ontologically pristine”⁶⁹ *face-to-face* encountering in *512 Hours* that enables participation to foster extraordinary exchanges of presence.

4.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, as ‘an unforgettable moment in the history of performance art’ *512 Hours* embodies the complex interactions and contradictions that accompany the politics and aesthetics of participation. Over the course of this chapter, I have unraveled my own encountering of Abramović’s public experiment, with particular emphasis on the perceived value of *being there*; agency; and to a greater extent the ways in which presence was manifested.

Early in the chapter, my analysis established spectators’ touristic appetite for participatory work, and the way that participation has enjoyed a privileged position because of its perceived consumer value. I determined how the selfie and the use of blogs and social networking sites act as tangible reminders of spectators’ participatory encounters, offering further opportunity for spectators to claim “bragging rights”. Furthermore, Abramović’s uptake of Tumblr implies that the opportunity to socialise our participatory experiences, as well as to entice new participants has not been lost on the artist.

⁶⁹ “ontologically pristine” is the term that Philip Auslander uses in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999) in relation to Peggy Phelan’s valorisation of live performance as separate from mediated technologies, outlined in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993).

While I have demonstrated how *512 Hours* represents a spectacle of sociability rather than a more sustainable and critical form of engagement, at the same time the extraordinary coming together of people who would not ordinarily share the same space can be seen as its own call to action and as a form of passive resistance. Nonetheless, I draw attention to the way that both mindfulness and leaving our everyday lives in the lockers actually prioritises individual experience over collective consciousness. Indeed, my own struggle to forget my responsibilities became a barrier to my “attendant” participation in the work.

In my exploration of the emancipation of spectators, drawing on the writing of Breel, I reflected on how my agency within the work was limited by the restrictions that I encountered, consistent with ‘the display of agency’, rather than as a truly agentic experience. Yet, I have also acknowledged that in my own witnessing the bodily sensation of agency could be perceived in several spectators’ changed physicality, notably affecting the aesthetic of participation as a whole. Therefore, although *512 Hours* does not for the most part foster a pro-active form of agency, it does not necessarily make the experience any less meaningful for spectators. While, I conclude that participants in *512 Hours* are not wholly emancipated spectators because their encountering is clearly defined by closely monitored parameters, I propose that the imposed boundaries of the performance also act as a mechanism to bring the public together.

This brings me to the main focus of the chapter; an analysis of the varying mutations of presence that reveal themselves in *512 Hours* and their convergence with the emergent processes of participation. I have concluded how the “I was there” of

participation and the presence of risk produces a heightened state of self-awareness in the expectant bodies of both Abramović and her spectators. I established how Abramović's extraordinary presence is a driving factor in the ability to influence and manage audience participation, opening out the concepts of "auratic presence" (Power), "stage presence" (Goodall), and "the strong concept of presence" (Fischer-Lichte). The discussion proceeded to reveal how the artist's embodied presence returns a feeling of embodiment to her spectators, drawing on the corresponding theories of "PRESENCE: PRESENCE" (Fischer-Lichte), "prae-sens" (Machon), "écriture féminine" (Cixous) and "ontological participation" (Cull). I propose that it is through these various utterances of embodiment in *512 Hours*, notwithstanding the limitations of my own participation, that the spectator is given access to an extended window of perception that produces extraordinary moments of engagement. In the next part of the chapter, I emphasised the significance of time in Abramović's practice and how this underpinned the emergence of different modes of presence and levels of participation. I noted Abramović's capacity to create "black holes" in which spectators can experience the depth of time; and the ability to generate her own "electromagnetic field" by channelling the energy of the public.

In the penultimate stage of the chapter, I have outlined the phenomenology of presence as co-presence within *512 Hours*, engaging with Heidegger's concepts of "out-standing standing-within" developed by Jones, and the related notion of "neighboring nearness", as well as Levinas's consideration of the "infinity of the Other". I have maintained that the platform epitomises "out-standing standing-within" as a form of 'knowing' at the same time as 'not-knowing', through its capacity to bring different people together, as well as enabling spectators to turn into themselves. Furthermore,

“out-standing standing-within” provides a potential framework through which to disentangle the act of witnessing and the paradox of participation. I have outlined how the supposed suspension of time in *512 Hours*, works towards the co-presence of spectators in an embodied and infinite facing. Yet, despite the utopian vision of sociability on display in Abramović’s practice, *512 Hours* brings forth Levinas’s “infinity of the Other”, as the passing encounters between strangers negate a complete perception of the other as wholly there, in a performance that is ‘always in action and never done’ (S. Jones 2012: 164).

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the emergent processes of participation are closely tied to the ways in which the spectator is present in *512 hours*. The criticisms concerning participation, specifically those pertaining to its commodification and value, are perhaps as much directed at its popularity than at participation per se. Though I acknowledge that we should be aware of the way in which art’s autonomy might be compromised by the experience economy; I want to reiterate that it is essential that we don’t lose sight of the *experience itself* and what it can offer the spectator, as one *512 Hour* Tumblr blogger writes:

I was present and my presence became
the space for others, and my breath
became the time for others
and I was the mediator and
everyone else were mine

Chapter Five: The Ethics of Participation in an “Ethically Imperfect World”

5.1 The Fifth Encounter: Gob Squad’s *Western Society*

It is August 2015. I am sitting in the audience for Gob Squad’s *Western Society* at the Southbank Centre, London. In the opening sequence, we are introduced to four naked performers: Simon, Sean, Sharon and Sarah. Their only costume is 1970s inspired wigs and platform shoes, and they are “dripping in bling”. The premise of the performance is that an ordinary and scarcely watched YouTube video of a family karaoke night will be re-enacted, to represent a microcosm of Western society in the twenty-first century. The set is rearranged to loosely resemble the living room from the video - the site of the family gathering; it will also become the meeting place for Sharon’s Mum and partner; the imaginary living room of Simon’s thirteen-year old daughter; and the location for a reunion between Sarah and her Dad. While attempting to re-enact the seven roles depicted on the original video, the four performers concede that they could think bigger. It is at this point in the show that Sarah suggests that they “open the border” and give some audience members the opportunity to “bask in the glow of the performance”.

The audience is told that there will be seven golden tickets handed out to spectators at random. The lucky winners will be made VIPs and rewarded with champagne and chocolates, while the rest of the audience watch from the sidelines. As the seven golden tickets are given out, each one represented by a furry toy animal; there is a mixture of both delight and fear amongst the audience. The first cuddly toy (ticket) lands in the lap of a middle-aged male spectator sitting in front of me, and is met with uncertainty as he asks his male companion “Does that mean I have to go up?” Rising from his seat, he is applauded by the audience in an act of solidarity: we are with him,

even if we have been left behind. I note a young woman visibly waving her hands above her head in the hope of either catching a ticket or signalling to Sarah and Sharon to throw one her way. And of course, who can blame her for this display of “entrepreneurial participation”,⁷⁰ as *Western Society* makes it explicit that participant-spectators are offered special privileges. She may also consider herself to be an expert participant-spectator, keen to share her abilities whenever the opportunity should arise. Her enthusiasm is recognised with a flying toy carp knowingly thrown in her direction.

During the excitement, I wondered if I should try to win one of the tickets, and if one did come my way whether I would accept the invitation. I knew that by participating I would have a more active role in the performance and I would be able to take in the view from Gob Squad’s side of the border. Yet, I wasn’t sure that I wanted to make the required level of commitment, and once on their side it would be difficult to escape unnoticed. From my seat, I had the freedom to watch both the performance and the audience around me. I was also able to observe some spectators literally escaping from the theatre. For some spectators, *Western Society* can offer a ‘limit experience’⁷¹ because of the demand to perform on stage for a sustained amount of time (approximately one-hour). A few tickets into the selection process and Gob Squad suggested that you could decline the invitation by passing the ticket on to someone else, although I didn’t witness any decliners. Again, it is important to recognise that for the most part this was a specialist audience of contemporary theatre/live art-goers, some of whom would have read about the participation in reviews and publicity material, or seen it in the video footage available on YouTube. It could be said, therefore, that some

⁷⁰ See Adam Alston (2013: 128) for a definition of this term.

⁷¹ See Karoline Gritzner (2011: 111) for a definition of this term.

audience members already had a special complicity with the performance, which was enhanced further by the rapport and suggested border crossing that Gob Squad established right from the beginning. On a related note, performing-spectators were urged to take their smart phones and media devices on stage with them, perhaps as a way of encouraging the dissemination of their experience to other potential spectators.

Approaching the final ticket, a Gob Squad performer compared it to being the “last in the team to be picked”, which encapsulates my feeling of anxiety as I waited to see which team I would be on. However, this analogy was soon followed with the suggestion that “sometimes it’s good to sit in the dark and watch, right?”, and to my relief this was to be my fate. One by one each ticket winner arrived on stage and was directed towards stage left, which was an off stage (on stage) VIP area that consisted of a large table and set of chairs, complete with champagne and chocolates. Here the exclusive club of performing-spectators appeared to be cast in their parts and given headphones, through which they would receive instructions from the performers. Meanwhile, back in the dark, we were being spurred on to sing along and sway our arms in the air to Michael Jackson’s *Earth Song*.

As the re-enactment develops, the Gob Squad performers confess their desire to join in. They may tell us that it’s okay to be on the side-lines, but they cannot resist their desire to be back on the inside of the performance. One of the performers draws a direct likeness between the interaction of strangers at a party and the participant-spectators intermingling in the staged family gathering. They observe that these are people who are sharing in this unique experience together; people who otherwise may not come into contact; people who have left their theatre companions behind to form new bonds in the

“new world”. The party on stage becomes a temporary utopia, where cultural and social preconceptions no longer have relevance.

In the final scene, as Sarah sings along to Bobby Darin’s *The Party’s Over*, we are given a poignant example of spectators cast as both performing-spectators and watching-spectators at the same time, or what we might think of as performing-watching-spectators. It occurs when the participants are invited to come around to the front of the stage to watch a recording of their re-enactment, which is being played in slow motion on the screen. As they laugh and look in some astonishment at their performance, they appear to be back on the outside looking in. However, they have not been returned to their original audience status, as they remain out of their seats and in full view of the watching-spectators. While we watch the participants watching themselves, they are still performing-spectators, only now they are performing spectating. It might even be said that they are mirroring us as spectators; as we were once them, laughing and watching in some astonishment at their unfurling performance. Yet, the participants’ newly acquired status is acknowledged at the end of the piece when they appear in the curtain call alongside the company members to receive the audience’s applause. The party is over and my thoughts turn once more to ‘the morning after (the night before)’ as I contemplate the implications of “opening the border” in what Bishop has come to describe as “delegated performance” (2008).

5.2 Introduction

In this final chapter I will focus on the use of audience participation in the work of UK and German ensemble, Gob Squad, specifically looking at their recent performances *Western Society* (2015) as described above, and *War and Peace* (2016) recounted later

in the discussion. These performances follow their previous practice wherein ‘the audience are often asked to step beyond their traditional role as passive spectators and bear witness to the results’ (Gob Squad 2016a). Reflecting on my own bearing witness of this stepping beyond, the subject of ethics and its relationship to participation has become central to my analysis. In many ways ethics has underscored the numerous debates that have already taken place in the study; beginning with my first experience of La Pocha Nostra’s work and that request to lose some of my clothes, and later in my analysis of the commodification of art as experience. Ethics permeates all aspects of participation, from the aspiration to give audience members increased freedom and the code of practice which governs interaction, to the system by which the work is valued. In this final chapter, ethics will be afforded special “privilege”, to use a term that underpins both Gob Squad’s practice and the arguments under discussion. I will argue that participation raises the ethical stakes in performance, and it is this that makes it one of the most dynamic art forms of the twenty-first century.

The title of this chapter indicates that the focus of this discussion is the ethics of participation, while implying that the case study works are being made at a time of intense political unrest. The phrase an ‘ethically imperfect world’ is a direct reference to Gob Squad’s appropriation of Tolstoy’s preoccupation with morality (Gob Squad 2016b). The chapter gets under way by establishing the constitution of ethics in participatory performance, drawing on the writing of Nicholas Ridout. I follow this by briefly tracing the evolution of theatre and ethics from the theatre etiquette established in the late nineteenth century to a less certain conception within participatory live art today. The discussion will determine how an ethical framework is established by the

three “teams”⁷² in attendance during Gob Squad’s performances: the professional performers, the watching-spectators, and the performing-spectators. I propose that over the course of the action, these teams alternate between performing and spectating; and although each group has its own ethical considerations, they are interdependent on the ethics of the other teams.

During chapter four, I debated the notion that participatory performance is congruent with Joseph Pine and James Gilmore’s concept of “the experience economy”. I now wish to expand on this analysis from an ethical perspective by considering the delegation of labour to spectators, turning once more to the arguments offered by Claire Bishop and Jen Harvie, along with Ridout’s work in this area. I will examine how performance is delegated within Gob Squad’s practice and its effect on the audience, as well as returning to Jacques Rancière’s theory that we can be emancipated whilst staying in our seat. I argue that an “emancipated spectator” in a Gob Squad performance is not an “exploited spectator”; rather, their work draws some much needed self-reflexive attention to the perception of participation as a place of privilege and what Bishop calls ‘a luxury game’. I will also posit that the treatment of performing-spectators as VIPs and the shared curtain call at the end of the performance represents a form of payment for services rendered.

My analysis of the ethics of participation is also supported by my sixth encounter, as an audience member for Gob Squad’s *War and Peace*. This experience provides further insights on the construction of an ethical framework in participation, and leads into a section on the “spectator within” us, which engages with Ridout’s theorising. The

⁷² The term “teams” is used by Erving Goffman in his study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959: 85).

discussion expands into a consideration of Erving Goffman's concept that as individuals we put on a "front" before observers. These debates also remain in dialogue with earlier discussions around the paradox of participation, namely the duality of performing and spectating.

In the next part of the study, I look at the role of ethics in the exchange that takes place between participants in performance. Building on my consideration of Levinas's writing on presence (1969 [1961]), explored in the previous chapter, I will examine the idea of "ethics as encounter". What follows is a discussion concerning the doubling process that transpires when one individual is "impressed" upon another, producing a form of "sympathy" or what might be better understood as empathy. In the final part of this section I return to Goffman's concept of "teams" to illustrate how their 'reciprocal dependence' and 'reciprocal familiarity' converge to determine ethics as encounter.

This chapter also recognises the occasions when spectators misinterpret, disregard, or re-configure their relationship to participation; therefore, unsettling the ethical framework for the performance. In truth, these disruptions to the form can provide some of the most exciting moments in the performance, as they make the risk and liveness of participation palpable. As I disentangle participation gone wrong, I arrive at three types of transgressive spectatorship; the "errant spectator" as defined by Adam Alston, the "mis-spectator" identified by Ridout, and what I am calling the "dis-spectator". At the centre of my analysis is a group of 'hecklers' in the audience of *War and Peace* and their targeted jeering at a performing-spectator.

In addition to the critical analysis and philosophical thoughts that underpin the arguments contained in this chapter, I conducted a Skype interview (July 2016) with

Gob Squad's Sharon Smith, who performed in both of the case study works. This conversation is placed in dialogue with my own experience as a spectator and the related theoretical concepts to offer an in depth evaluation of the ethics of participation from multiple perspectives.

5.3 Towards an Ethics of Participation

This section begins to establish the relationship between ethics and participatory performance. In *Theatre and Ethics*, Ridout offers a general definition that '[e]thics is about being good and staying good by acting well' (2009: 11). Furthermore, he suggests that one might think about ethics as the process of working out on what basis we decide what is good or bad, and what gives us the capacity to make those judgements (2009: 11). However, this calculation is especially complex in participatory performance, as 'alongside the "parts" created for us by the performers are other habitual, sticky roles, including that of spectator' (Heddon, Iball, Zerihan 2012: 121). This raises the issue of how participants judge *their* performance and *the* performance. Additionally, how do watching-spectators evaluate their experience, and what and whom is being critiqued?

The issue of how we make value judgements about participatory performance is highlighted by Claire Bishop in her consideration of 'the ethical turn' (2012). She notes that 'socially engaged practices are extremely difficult to discuss within the conventional frameworks of art criticism' (Bishop 2012: 18). This results from an ethical imperative towards 'a good or bad model of collaboration' rather than an aesthetic requirement of artistic mastery (Ibid., 19-20). As such, there is an emphasis on 'process as product', bolstered by a resistance to the commodification of art within a capitalist culture (Ibid., 19). In *Conversation Pieces*, art historian, Grant Kester notes

that '[a]rt's function as a form of emancipatory communication is almost always presented in opposition to a malevolent other (kitsch, mass culture, etc.) that threatens to destroy or compromise it in some way' (2004: 29-30). Nevertheless, as this chapter will establish, there can be a tension in the way that the relationship between ethics and aesthetics is interpreted by spectators.

Acknowledging that ethics are foundational to participatory work, it is important to look at what kind of ethics is being promoted. Ethical frameworks are often founded on social consensus; thus, how to 'act' is typically fairly prescriptive. Theatre etiquette is the most recognisable system of ethical behaviour in performance. Its origins are consistent with, but not limited to, the introduction of electric lighting in theatres in the 1880s. The ability to lower the houselights on the audience resulted in their previously noisy and demonstrative behaviour being faded into the darkness (Heim 2016: 64). By the latter half of the twentieth century, laughter and applause were largely the only permissible signs of audience engagement with a performance. However, the proliferation of participatory forms from the late 1990s onwards has served to rethink audience behaviour; casting theatre etiquette or ethics into a period of uncertainty.

This does not mean that spectatorship in these works is without rules. On the contrary, as the study has demonstrated, participation is underpinned by a tacit agreement that spectators will accept the rules of the performance. But, these rules are usually specific to an individual performance or artist/company's style; therefore, they are lacking the same level of convention for the audience. Still, at the same time, there is a strong impulse to "give good audience" and to participate in normative assumptions about the work, perhaps invoking the notion of an "ideal audience-participant" (Heddon,

et al 2012: 124). Indeed, this role might be played convincingly by the expert participant-spectator, as standards are established through their prior experience and specially developed skills, enabling them to translate and communicate how one should act. While this can offer stability to fellow spectators and the performance maker, for Gob Squad these practised spectators are to be avoided, as I will discuss later in the chapter.

There are also times when the instructions for a participatory work are deliberately opaque or open to interpretation, in an attempt to offer greater agency to the spectator; for example, the themes offered to participants during La Pocha Nostra's improvised human mural, and the questions posed to participant-spectators during Gob Squad's *War and Peace*. To cite Ridout: 'It is in the situation of doubt, in the moment of choice, when you ask yourself, "How shall I act?", that you are opening up the space of ethics' (2009: 12). This space of ethics might also be equated to Fisher's 'space of speech' (2011: 25), examined in chapter two, as a place where established structures are suspended to allow alternative models of democratic politics and resistance to be opened up. It might also be reasoned that it is amidst an ethical ambiguity that one finds the "antagonism" that Bishop (2004) calls for in socially engaged art.

Ridout identifies social engagement as an area of convergence between theatre and ethics, in the way that theatre regularly dramatises social issues which might easily be thought of as ethical dilemmas (2009: 13). Gob Squad is no exception to this tendency and both *Western Society* and *War and Peace* actively draw the audience into social and ethical problems, often asking the performing-spectators direct questions that involve them making a moral decision. As Ridout observes: 'Theatre inserts its ethical questions

into the lives of its spectators in a situation in which those spectators are unusually conscious of their own status as spectators, and thus as people who may exercise ethical judgement' (2009: 15). In Gob Squad's practice, ethical questions are literally inserted into the framework for participation, heightening the spectators' awareness of their ethical responsibility. There is also that remarkable moment in *Western Society* when performing-spectators can be seen watching a recording of themselves while knowing that their watching is being observed by the audience; hence, embodying a process of reciprocal spectatorship that is consistent with a symmathesy of participation. I suggest that it is the duality of making a judgement at the same time as being judged that gives ethics its potency in the theatre, which is magnified and complicated when participation is present.

As previously noted, there is an established distinction between the one who 'acts' and the one who 'judges' in the theatre, distinguished by the roles of 'performer' and 'spectator'. However, following Caroline Heim's argument (2016) outlined in chapter two, in the case study works by Gob Squad there are three troupes present: professional performers, watching-spectators, and performing-spectators. Yet, what is particularly striking is the way in which these troupes can be seen exchanging roles. As parts are reconfigured and interchanged within the performance, questions regarding responsibility and authority inevitably arise, which can bring forth both exciting and potentially troublesome consequences. To echo Fischer-Lichte, when we open the border between the performance and the audience, the dichotomies on which traditional notions of theatre come to be founded are renegotiated. I propose that it is on this threshold that a space for ethics is opened up which empowers us to reconsider our basis for deciding what is good or bad.

However, Gob Squad has never been bound by mainstream theatre conventions due to its interdisciplinary constitution, with members coming from varying artistic fields. In the Skype interview, Smith explained that: “we didn’t have to really un-train. There were none of those theatre problems in our way” (2016: 2). Indeed, it may well be the fact that live art does not need to break from a tradition to which it never belonged that enables it to be at the forefront of experiments with the audience. Nonetheless, although there may not be “those theatre problems”; this does not mean that there are not expectations and ethical codes of behaviour in relation to Gob Squad’s work. Following Herbert Blau’s (1990) assertion that actors and spectators are co-dependant, I suggest that in Gob Squad’s performances each troupe is actualised in the presence of the other. As such, while each of them is governed by their own set of rules, they are interdependent.

The performing-spectators are always the newest troupe to be formed, as they are brought together as the performance unfolds. Their presence complicates the ethics of the Gob Squad performers and the watching-spectators, in part because the performing-spectators’ impulse towards participation is premised on an element of risk. Yet, as I have implied in relation to the attendance of expert participant-spectators and superfans, the space for ethics within this latest group is perhaps closing, as participation becomes normalised through its growing popularity. Just as a mainstream audience has learnt how to perform its role through watching the behaviour of other audience members and following the given rules of theatre etiquette; contemporary audiences of participatory practice may also find themselves performing in rather prescriptive and predetermined ways. Bishop identifies that ‘[y]ou hear yourself speaking in clichés, unable to break the

conceptual structure that the artist has set in place' (2008: 120). At first glance, Gob Squad's use of "remote acting" might be considered as a highly obedient form of audience participation; however, as I will show, their practice draws self-referential critical attention to the concept of participation as a privilege, epitomising the metaphor of delegated performance as 'a luxury game'.

5.4 Delegated Performance as a Luxury Game

This discussion will explore the notion that participatory performance can be seen as a place of privilege. In addition, it recognises a developing scepticism about the ways in which spectators are employed to co-produce the work, with the suggestion that the so-called emancipated spectator may well be the exploited spectator. The immersive theatre company You Me Bum Bum Train (YMBBT), which offers an extravagant alternate reality experience for an individual passenger, has most notably been accused of exploiting its army of unpaid volunteer performers.⁷³ The producers, Kate Bond and Morgan Lloyd,⁷⁴ claim that it isn't financially viable to pay their volunteers and that the experience is in fact a "training project" for them and "not simply a show being staged for the entertainment of the 'audience' and the commercial gain of the producers or promoters" (Hutchison 2016). An article in *The Telegraph* billed it as 'the volunteering experience of a lifetime', with the number of volunteers now in the tens of thousands (Chandrasekhar 2012). Harvie notes:

[I]t could be argued that such worker exploitation is pervasive ... across much contemporary art and performance, where audiences are increasingly regularly called on to participate in, contribute to and at least co-create the performance also for free and sometimes, more precisely, at the *cost* of a fee. (2013: 28)

⁷³ There have been threats of legal action by the performers union Equity, and a campaign launched by the blog Actorsminimumwage (AMW) that volunteers should be paid National Minimum Wage.

⁷⁴ According to an interview with *The Telegraph* in 2012, neither of the producers receives a wage from YMBBT (Chandrasekhar 2012).

Still, Harvie is quick to acknowledge that in many instances of audience participation, audience members are not so much ‘*passively exploited*’ as ‘*actively exploit*’ the opportunity to be performing-spectators and part-time artists (Ibid., emphasis original). Furthermore, she asserts that regardless of which side of the debate one stands, given the shift in the production of art and performance and the redeployment of labour, it is imperative that one questions how this effects social power relations (Ibid.; 28-29).

Gob Squad was an early adopter of audience participation in contemporary performance, beginning with *Room Service* in 2003. As Smith discusses, “[w]e wanted to bring somehow the real world inside the theatre, or still have a connection to the outside via some sort of media or technology which would allow, again, this leak. And that eventually became ... the audience themselves” (2016: 2). Bishop highlights that in contrast to the way that visual artists in the 1960s and 1970s used their own bodies as the form and content of their work, with implied authenticity,⁷⁵ contemporary artists delegate or “outsource” authenticity by using other people’s bodies (2008: 110). The notions of “outsourcing”⁷⁶ and “delegated performance” can be seen as concurrent tendencies (Bishop 2008: 118). Delegated performance exemplifies Joseph Beuys’s metaphor that ‘everyone is an artist’ by offering the audience agency to contribute to the art making process. According to Harvie, ‘[d]elegated art and performance thus celebrate amateurism, doing art for the pleasure of it’ (2013: 36). This is corroborated by YMBBT, where non-professional actors typically make up 80 percent of their

⁷⁵ The way that “authenticity” has been reconsidered by contemporary artists, as outlined in Bishop’s 2008 article, is indicative of how this term and the related notions of being real, true and genuine are mutable and contested concepts. My usage of the term “authenticity” is consistent with the ways in which it has been interpreted by Bishop (2008), and acknowledges that the meaning alters when “authenticity” is performed.

⁷⁶ The term “outsourcing” is a 1990s buzzword that refers to the subcontracting of activities from one business to another.

volunteers, as producer Bond notes, '[t]hey're happy to be subtle, which is much more authentic' (Chandrasekhar 2012). Yet, the 20 percent of YMBBT's volunteers who do have acting experience coincides with my suggestion that artists are also known to rely on a contingent of expert participant-spectators to maintain a certain level of cogency and quality.

Gob Squad maintain that they actively avoid expert participants precisely because they lack authenticity, as Smith states: "we definitely would not choose the person who looks like they're saying choose me, choose me. And that's because if they start acting up on stage ... they will not look good" (2016: 10). She coincidentally remembered the eager young woman that I noted in my account, recalling: "There was a woman who was desperate to catch one of these toys ... obviously I could see her so I had to sort of look at her and I even threw some toys in her vague direction but there was no way I was going to throw it into her arms" (2016: 11). Expertise has a paradoxical relationship to participation, as it is often implied that it is neither necessary nor desirable, potentially undoing the authenticity of the work or what we might think of as contaminating the "leak" that Gob Squad refer to. Simultaneously, there is a view that everyone has the expertise to get involved; thus, participation is seen as a great equaliser. Additionally, as I have discussed, though expert participant-spectators may not feature in the intended aims of participatory artists, in reality they make up a notable portion of a live art audience and are self-made through their learnt behaviour of typified responses to participation. I wish to propose that to avoid nurturing expert participant-spectators and an etiquette of participation, artists have to keep changing the rules or at the very least provide a space for ethics in which those rules might be

reinterpreted. I suggest that it is in this liminal space, permeated with the potential for failure and transgression, where participation is at its most alive.

In contrast to conventional theatre, where people pretend to be other people, part of the appeal of participatory practice in live art contexts is the promise of authenticity. André Antoine's assertion that we need a new breed of actors 'who are spontaneous and authentic, in touch with reality through and through' might well be attributed to the participant-spectators who have emerged on to the stage in contemporary performance (citing Antoine 1890 in Drain 1995: xvii). In this way, the ethics of participation may suggest that a "good" performance is interchangeable with the idea of an "authentic" performance. This echoes Andy Lavender's claim that "authenticity" has become one of the defining terms of contemporary performance practice (2016: 25). *In The Experience Economy a new perspective*, Albert Boswijk and his co-authors consider that 'Authenticity is about rediscovering values and traditions and interpreting them in a new way within a progressive context. The individual is looking for genuineness and originality: for the core and essence of things' (2007: 46). This analysis also corresponds to the discussion in chapter three concerning the way that performance makes the ordinary conspicuous (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 179-180). I suggest that perhaps the real *art* in *participatory* performance is being able to perform your authentic self without looking like you are performing. However, while the notion of staging authenticity might be argued as being inauthentic, it is essentially the combination of two different types of authenticity – stemming from the heart and the head. This hybrid form of authenticity is both emotional and logical, as the participant on stage is very much the same as their original self, but nonetheless different. On the one hand they recognise that their genuineness is sought, but on the other hand they also see the need

to customise their authenticity for the audience and in the situation of performance.

What is presented becomes an adjusted form of authenticity, which corresponds with Goffman's concept of "front", discussed later in the chapter.

Delegated performance may be underpinned by the rhetoric of participation as a democratising of the arts; however, its use of other people's bodies to complete the work has provoked criticism that participants are being exploited. In *Western Society*, Gob Squad's delegation of labour makes explicit the way that participation creates social power relations that can be both politically enabling and limiting. When Gob Squad "open the border" and invite audience participation it is a direct reference to the border politics of Western society; however, it also denotes to a lesser extent the breaking down of the imaginary "wall" that exists between performers and spectators.

As Smith puts it:

[W]e're using the metaphor of the theatre lights ... We're playing with the idea that the audience are outside Western society quite literally. They're ... refugees seeking asylum and we have the key to the gate. So we're really playing, because ... the title is *Western Society* and we create this idea of a very lush, privileged, safe, light, warm space and suggest that the darkness of the seating area is somehow outside that ... It's quite a crude and direct metaphor and it relates less to our feelings about theatre, although of course ... we absolutely refer to the fourth wall and a wall or as a gate or whatever that's locked. (2016: 4)

In *Western Society* the selection of refugees (spectators) to this advantaged space is a "strange lottery", and where you are located (sitting in the auditorium) largely dictates your chances of receiving the "key to the gate".

The theme of privilege is one of the most pertinent aspects of *Western Society*, and more recently *War and Peace*. What is more, audience participation is used in part to demonstrate the artifice and inequality of social power relations at play when participation is present. This is at its most perceptible in the metaphor of the VIP status

that is awarded to participant-spectators in *Western Society*, who are given special access to a guest area where they are lavished with complimentary champagne and refreshments. This notable image of privilege also converges with Bishop's contention that unlike the inexpensive performance art of the 1960s and 1970s, which was produced quickly and centred on the artist's own body, 'delegated performance, by contrast, is a luxury game' (2008: 114). One only needs to look at Marina Abramović to see a clear example of this shift, as the relatively modest requirements of *Rhythm 0* (1974), with its six hour duration and 72 objects on a table, has grown into *512 Hours*, with lockers and noise-cancelling headphones for 160 people at a time as well as an army of gallery assistants. While Abramović maintains that "this show was zero cost" (KunstSpektrum 2014) this appears to be contradicted by the list of her supporters on the Serpentine website, which includes her exhibition circle and the luxury brand Givenchy. In addition, the gallery receives public funding through Arts Council England; therefore, although admittance to *512 Hours* was free of charge, the tax payer indirectly paid towards the exhibition (Serpentine Galleries 2016). Similarly, YMBBT has come under fire as a recipient of Arts Council funding, in the way that the public is paying for the privileged experience of a few. This appears especially uneven in light of the fact that they actively seek celebrity endorsement, allowing individuals who already hold a privileged position to bypass the usual ballot process to obtain a ticket. There is something ethically unsettling about the public subsidising the once in a lifetime experience of Prince Harry (March 2016) and Madonna and her son Rocco (April 2016). Furthermore, tickets for YMBBT are priced at £48.50 and have become hot commodities, but, like Punchdrunk and Secret Cinema, this price point is a barrier for many people.

Yet, it should also be recognised that the majority of live artists continue to use audience participation in a way that is relatively inexpensive and affordable to the audience. Gob Squad's *Western Society* does not profess to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience or even immersive; the action tends to unfold within the duration of a few hours, supported by a modest set design that includes the use of a projection screen and a selection of props and costumes. In this way, it does not demand the hefty ticket prices of some immersive companies, with Gob Squad tickets averagely priced at around £15. In actuality, *Western Society* does not represent Bishop's notion of delegated performance as "a luxury game"; however, theatrically it does exactly that. The manner in which performing-spectators are directly referred to and treated as VIPs artificially elevates their status, as Smith states: "the VIP table is very cheap; we're being very cynical about the luxury" (2016: 6). At the same time, the VIP table also enables the Gob Squad performers to have an intimate exchange with the performing-spectators, including casting them into their re-enactment roles. According to Smith:

[W]e want to frame their presence on the stage in a way that means we can have a real conversation, even if there's headphones and instructions and silly costumes and artifice involved. That we can exist there and we can really be there and when we look at each other, we see each other and when we speak to each other we're having an actual conversation. (2016: 7)

The VIP table occupies a liminal space, in the off stage (on stage) area to the living room, where the viewing audience can clearly see the Gob Squad performers toasting and chatting to the performing-spectators. The Gob Squad performers remove elements of their costume in what appears to be an attempt to become real people like the participants. It could also be seen as an attempt to dissolve any perceived hierarchy of performer over spectator. At the VIP table the action is largely improvised; in contrast to the living room area, where much of the performance is loosely scripted and

instructed to the participants through their headphones. Nevertheless, though this exchange may foster a closer relationship between performing-spectators and the Gob Squad performers, it arguably has the opposite effect for watching-spectators. As observers of the interaction between Gob Squad and the performing-spectators, we become aware that their proximity affords them special knowledge of the performance; experiences that we are unable to hear, feel or taste. It is difficult in this moment not to feel a pang of jealousy as someone left on the outside looking in. The greater the proximity participants have to the performance, through these private moments, the further away the watching audience feels. Still, at the same time, we can never forget that we might have been part of the lucky seven; therefore, those watching continue to empathise with their fellow spectators on the stage, albeit from a seat in the dark.

According to Gob Squad, being outside also has its benefits, echoed by the remark that “sometimes it’s good to sit in the dark and watch”. Indeed, it was this comment that prompted me to ask Smith if a spectator can be emancipated whilst staying in their seat, to which she replied:

Yes, unanimously yes. Before the audience gets involved in the work we still hope to work with the semi-improvisational structures ... we are live writing that work in real time and, therefore, the room is active in that writing. And that involves the audience and that, therein it feels different ... they’re definitely activated even if they’re just sitting there. Because they’re affecting ... if they sneeze or laugh or walk out ... or not. Whether they are a small audience or a large audience ... it’s felt in Gob Squad’s work, it’s not ignored. (2016: 8)

As it happens, there are also moments when the seated audience is encouraged to collectively participate in the performance; joining in the movement actions to Michael Jackson’s *Earth Song* is one example. Therefore, although the spectators in the darkened auditorium are not offered full asylum, they are given limited entry.

5.5 Delegated Performance as a Projection Screen

At this stage in the study, I wish to draw attention to the way in which performing-spectators are used as a metaphorical projection of the underpinning politics of Gob Squad's work. This discussion also extends to the actual use of projection within *Western Society*. In Gob Squad's practice, participation works towards producing parallel feelings of alienation and connection with their audience. Smith states:

We find the audience in the theatre situation in *Western Society* as ... a projection screen in a way. They arrive in a situation visibly unprepared and ... they wear headphones that are very visible. And they become involved in something we call remote acting ... and the audience therefore looks at two things at once. They see this body, this unprepared body and they maybe hear the words of another, or see the actions of another. And it's something that if we were doing it as performers ... there would be no disconnect. There would be an assumption maybe that we owned that text. (2016: 2-3)

The notion of the audience "as a projection screen" converges with Abramović's statement that the audience can '*project onto me like a mirror*' (in O'Brien 2014: 34 emphasis original), and Fischer-Lichte's concept of "PRESENCE: PRESENCE" (2012: 115). It is indicative of the duality and doubling presence between the Gob Squad performer and their counterpart remote actor, as well as between the performing-spectator and the watching-spectator. Smith's emphasis on the "unprepared body" of the spectator corresponds to the idea of "outsourcing" authenticity, and is placed in opposition to the notable artifice of the headphones. This serves to magnify rather than compromise the performing-spectators' genuineness, as an obvious lack of control over proceedings makes them all the more vulnerable. However, it could be argued that instead of empowering the audience, remote acting encourages the kind of obedience that Harvie cautions against (Harvie 2013: 43). In fact, Gob Squad counteract this argument by adopting remote acting as an alienation device, and notably exposing its innate power dynamic, as part of its self-reflexive critique on participation.

Remote acting functions as an alienation device resulting from the way that the watching-spectator bears witness to the strangeness of the performing-spectator communicating the words and actions of the Gob Squad performer. This has a distancing effect that encourages the seated audience to engage more critically with what they are seeing. It follows Gob Squad's refusal to own the text and is demonstrative of their desire for shared authorship with their audience. Moreover, on seeing the performing-spectator compute what is being said to them through the headphones, the watching-spectator registers a process of translation. Applying the notion of the performing-spectators as a projection screen, what is reflected back to the auditorium is Rancière's conception of an emancipated audience as 'a community of storytellers and translators' (Rancière 2007: 280).

Nonetheless, at the same time, Gob Squad exposes the power dynamic that underscores remote acting, by deliberately drawing attention to the status of the artist. This occurs during a scene in which Sarah can be seen whispering instructions to a performing-spectator who is in the role of her Dad, rather than communicating through the headphones. Closely followed by a sequence where Simon is evidently communicating with the Dad through a microphone that connects to his headphones. Instead of negating the scepticism that has been imposed on participatory practice, Gob Squad highlights the exploitative potential of delegated performance. Gob Squad's embodied assessment of participatory practice emerges from the fact that they are part of its trajectory, rather than a reflection of its popularity. While Harvie warns that delegated performance may risk replicating exploitative and manipulative contemporary labour relations, she notes that 'at its best, it draws self-reflexive critical attention to that

risk' (2013: 29). Similarly, Bishop notes that the strongest examples of delegated performances: 'produce disruptive events that testify to a shared reality between viewers and performers that throw into question agreed ways of thinking about subjectivity, ethics, and economics', rather than staging 'the mere spectacle of participation' (2008: 123).

One way in which Gob Squad maintains some agency and autonomy for their audience is by allowing a degree of "play" within their framework for participation. Therefore, even though Gob Squad's model of participation operates within a structure that determines where the performance is going from beginning, middle to end, as Smith tells us, "there's room for play and for receiving signals from the outside" (2016: 4). This includes the act of translation which underscores remote acting, as the detail and direction given to them via the headphones is limited by the immediacy of the performance. Therefore, the remote actor is required to spontaneously interpret and act upon the information that they receive. In this way, and coinciding with the other case study performances, improvisation and reciprocity are essential components in the execution of remote acting and the continuation of the performance. However, it is worth noting that the interpretive decisions that the performing-spectator makes, such as their textual delivery or the manner in which they carry out actions, is not subject to directorial scrutiny, as that process is absent. Subsequently, there are moments when speech appears wooden, unrefined, and with incorrect intonation. But, rather than being condemned as a "bad" performance, on the contrary, this works to amplify the liveness and authenticity of the event: the notion that it is happening in "real-time" and with "real" people. When we critique the performance both during and after its realisation, *participation is its own criteria*. By this I mean that our evaluation is less about the

quality of the participant's performance, and more about their authenticity; the degree to which they committed to the task; and how their participation translated into meaning and experience.

A further manifestation of play in *Western Society* appears in the "open" spaces provided for questions and answer sessions with performing-spectators as themselves, which act as a running commentary throughout the piece. Participants consider topics ranging from whether national borders are good or bad, to a choice between their own limbs or their child's life. These moral dilemmas make visible the conception of performance as a space for ethics, as well as highlighting the futility of binaries. Following Bishop, these exchanges between Gob Squad members and performing-spectators fuse together 'the staged and the spontaneous' (Bishop 2008: 121). While authorial control is fundamental to the structure of these interactions, the end result is largely reliant on the skills of the participant to meet or even exceed the expectations of the Gob Squad performer and the viewing audience. Nevertheless, the artificiality of the theatrical setting and projection screen, which frame participation, draws attention to the inauthenticity of the participant's spontaneity (Ibid). This underscores my earlier statement that the *art* of spectator-participation resides in the performing-spectator's ability to stage their spontaneity while holding on to their authenticity. As Bishop notes, some of the most powerful instances of delegated performance are those that 'permit "authenticity" (subjects that are engaged, passionate, fragile, complex) to emerge within situations of intense artificiality' (Ibid., 120). Additionally, the mutual physical contact of performers and spectators visible during the Q&A scenes further challenges relational oppositions by unsettling the "us" and "them" divide between spectators and performers. At the same time, a new "us" and "them" is established in the form of those

that do and those that don't participate on stage, echoing David Beech's argument (2010: 25).

Thus far, I have examined how Smith's envisaging of the performing-spectators as a metaphorical projection screen works to create a form of disconnection and connection for the watching audience. I will now turn to the way that actual projection screens are employed in *Western Society*, to create both distance and intimacy between performing and watching audience members. Throughout the performance a projection screen is intermittently placed in front of the living room space, where a live feed of the unfolding action is shown. When we watch the developing participation through the screen it further frames the participant-spectators as performers; therefore, producing a greater distance between them and the watching audience.

Conversely, the close up and enlarged images of performing-spectators on the screens is exposing and invokes a sense of intimacy for the viewer. Moreover, as Figure 11 shows, the live image can frequently be seen in action through the screen or at the same time as the projected version.



Figure 11: The duality of live and mediated performing-spectators.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The source for this image is <https://www.lancasterarts.org/whats-on/gob-squad-western-society>

This corresponds with Philip Auslander's theory (1999), as the viewer no longer distinguishes between the live re-enactment on stage and the mediated version, and begins to accept the projected reality as their first point of reference. Yet, while camera tricks such as zooming in may bring the viewer closer to the subject, they are a reminder that what we see projected is a manipulated reality. Furthermore, as a final act of resistance to its disappearance on screen, the live performance steps out from behind the projection to observe the mediated version of itself. Hereafter, watching-spectators observe the performing-spectators reclaiming their authentic selves by becoming watching-spectators. Smith reflects:

[T]here's a return for them [performing-spectators] to ... the dark side. And they get to see the result of their labour in a way. The product that they've ... contributed to making. ... we liked the feeling of them being able to see themselves, and us being able to see them, see themselves. Us meaning everybody else. ... you see them get their set up, you see them get the toy, the space, you see them get constructed, the screen comes and sort of closes them in. You see them on the screen, they've gone into the TV and they start to do this video that you talked about for the first half an hour, forty minutes. And there's something really magical about that. ... letting them sort of see their own sort of premier screening in a way ... There's something really resolved about it. (2016: 13).

By watching the participants watching themselves on screen, the audience makes the performing-spectators consciously aware that their labour is being publicly acknowledged, and this for me goes some way towards withstanding the exploitative potential of delegated performance. I also suggest that it is performing-spectators' return to "the dark side", to their authentic self, which makes their shared curtain call with Gob Squad all the more meaningful. As Figure 12 illustrates, the united bow at the end of the performance provides a striking image of equality and payment for services rendered.



Figure 12: The shared curtain call.⁷⁸

Smith maintains:

[A]t the end of *Western Society* the applause is for those people. You know it's as much as it is for us ... it's [for] their friends and their friends' friends and it's just the general sense that they've been through that thing and they've come out of it looking really good. (2016: 9)

Significantly, the desire for participants to “look good” suggests a duty of care to those people, rather than a desire to take advantage of them.

The act of the audience watching the performing-spectators watching themselves epitomises the performance of presence as an emergent and processual phenomenon, as we see the notion of *being there* thrown into confusion in relation to the live and the mediated, now and then, us and them. To complicate matters further, the original

YouTube film fades into the end of the recorded footage:

[Y]ou just see the granny walking in ... and you see the guy come round to change the channel. So by this point it's a very, very recognisable film. And especially when you've embodied it. You know, when you've actually played granny and you've actually changed the channel. And then you see it with yourself and with this, you see that yes you have existed inside something that existed before. (S. Smith 2016: 14)

This perception of existence is magnified by the growing collection of *Western Society* remake videos on YouTube, which demonstrate that there are others who have existed

⁷⁸ The source for this image is <http://tdps.berkeley.edu/january-faculty-spotlight-alan-read>

inside something that existed before. Therefore, rather than fuelling alienation the technology works to connect previous participants, and to suggest that their experience “doesn’t end there” (S. Smith 2016: 14).

5.6 The Sixth Encounter: *War and Peace*

It is June 2016. I am waiting outside of the auditorium at the Nottingham Playhouse to gain entry to Gob Squad’s *War and Peace*. The basis for this new live video performance is that a group of artists are holding a salon, reminiscent of the gatherings conducted in High Society Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The topic of conversation is *War and Peace*, a “heavy” book written over almost a century and a half ago, and how the novel intersects with contemporary society. This playful and improvised work is ‘a modern day attempt to address one of Tolstoy’s concerns: how should one live a moral life in an ethically imperfect world?’ (Gob Squad 2016b).

Before we are let into the theatre, the performers emerge out of the entrance and begin to mingle with the expectant audience. They are dressed in a costume consisting of a beige coloured shirt with a long apron dress over the top. I note Simon’s platform shoes and make a comment to him that they are very Ibiza Circa 1997. He appears pleased with this observation, and I am pleased that I have shown willing. However, my participatory efforts go no further, as I become consciously aware that giving too much might be construed as a tacit agreement to do something much bigger. I take my seat towards the front; meanwhile the performers continue to conduct mini-interviews with spectators. Before long the purpose of these encounters is revealed, as performers begin to take to the stage with their spectator interviewees. They recount into a microphone a series of facts about the spectator including their name and where they come from, as

well as other titbits of information, such as their special talent or their Father's occupation. During this sequence, I spot Simon close at hand, and I start to panic that he might remember me from earlier. I avoid making eye contact with him as the words "don't pick me" race through my head. I question what would I say about myself; the truth, or a better, funnier version of the truth? I reason that it is much easier and safer to stay where I am. It turned out that I was right to weigh up the danger of participation, as the events that followed led to a performing-spectator being directly heckled by a group of audience members.

In contrast to *Western Society*, the participants in *War and Peace* are chosen, rather than selected at random. Nevertheless, reflecting on *Western Society*, there are some familiar strategies of participation in operation. Firstly, as Figure 13 shows, the VIP table is back; this time it is reframed as a High Society Russian salon, complete with refreshments for the invited spectators.



Figure 13: The salon.⁷⁹

But, in this production the table is in front of the raised stage, towards stage right. As such, the performing-spectators are not always clearly visible in the flesh; however, their participation is captured on camera and projected on the large screens on stage. In

⁷⁹ The source for this image is <http://www.gobsquad.com/projects/war-and-peace>

this way, it could be said that the performing-spectator's mediated image is more prominent than their live persona; although, this does depend on your proximity to the salon. Over the course of the evening, we are introduced to a procession of characters from both the book and beyond, and scenes unfold from shifting viewpoints. While all the time the salon of Gob Squad performers and performing-spectators are watching and taking stock of the action. At regular intervals the company members ask the performing-spectators about their own notions of war, freedom, privilege and safety, reminiscent of the questioning that took place during *Western Society*. Significantly, the performance is again completed with a shared curtain call between Gob Squad and the performing-spectators, where all are rewarded for the fruits of their labour with the rapturous applause of the audience.

5.7 The “spectator within” and the spectator out “front”

This next section takes as its starting point my anxiety about being selected as a performing-spectator in *War and Peace*, underpinned by a self-conscious awareness of how I might be perceived. This brings me once more to Ridout's writing on theatre and ethics, specifically his appropriation of philosopher Adam Smith's (1759) theory⁸⁰ that: 'we judge our own behaviour in the guise of an imaginary “spectator” within us' (2009: 33). The principle that underlines this concept is that we each possess an 'impartial spectator' inside ourselves, and it is to them that we direct our behaviour for ethical judgement. Our perception of whether or not the “spectator within” approves or disapproves of our actions will determine whether or not we consider our behaviour to be right or wrong. Ridout notes:

[I]ndividuals, in making ethical judgements, must separate themselves into two subjectivities – the one who judges and the one whose action is judged. This

⁸⁰ See Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (2002/1759).

distance – the distance marked out by the act of sympathising with oneself – is what distinguishes this kind of ethical judgement from simply doing as you please or acting in whatever way makes you feel good. (2009: 35)

This act of self-sympathy requires both an emotional connection to oneself and an element of disconnection which enables enough distance for reason to emerge. As Ridout puts it, drawing on Tracy Davis's writing (2004):⁸¹ 'A doubling of the self in which both reason and emotion are at work, in which there is an attempt to measure one against the other and let neither obliterate the other, becomes the basis for an ethical position' (2009: 35). He notes that it is an 'active dissociation', to use Davis's expression, which enables a critical viewpoint in oneself (Ibid., 36). This corresponds with Gob Squad's motivation to create a form of disconnection in *Western Society*, through their use of remote acting. However, while reason is generally recognised as underscoring alienation, it is also reliant on the presence of emotion as the entity from which ethical thought must stand aside (Ridout 2009: 36). One might also apply this doubling of the self to what I have called "the paradox of participation", in the sense that a performing-spectator is both the performer of the action and the audience who judges that action. Furthermore, the duality of this position nurtures both reason and emotion, and I suggest that operational participation is largely based on upholding equilibrium between these elements. Too much reason may stultify the participant and bring the participation to a standstill. Too much emotion may lead to the participant becoming carried away in the moment and acting up, which may shift the desired course of participation and develop into a more transgressive form of interaction. In this way, one might say that an imbalance between reason and emotion has the potential to undo the art of participation and to produce a "bad" performance. Conversely, undoing the art

⁸¹ See Tracy Davis's 2004 essay 'Theatricality and Civil Society' in Tracy C. Davis & Thomas Postlewait (eds) *Theatricality* (2003: 127-55).

may bring forth exactly the kind of “antagonism” which Bishop suggests is needed in socially engaged practice.

Drawing on my own experiences of participation, I also wish to propose that the “spectator within” us has a capacity to speak directly to us (“go on take a risk) or to express our inner feelings (“don’t pick me”). Yet, this impartial spectator is often influenced by what Heddon *et al* refer to as “introjection”, which they interpret as an ‘observance of once prescribed and now habitual behaviours carried by us all’ (2012: 125). These “introjects” frequently guide our moral compass and illustrate how one should act. As Heddon and her co-authors observe: ‘Commitment to our “introjects” (“I should be, I must be, I ought ...”) can be so strong that they often have the power to override our interest in our own well-being’ (Ibid). There are also times when the introjection clashes with our original impulse; thus, what we want to do and what we think we should do are at odds with each other. This can result in the participant offering an expected rather than a truthful response. Reflecting on my own impartial spectator in *War and Peace*, it is this split that brings a feeling of disappointment in one’s self, as my frequent impulse not to participate is in conflict with the introject that I must “give good audience” and please the artist/company. The omnipresence of “the ideal spectator” is never far away, beseeching me to cede my will and take the plunge. More often than not, I hold firm to my original and honest response, but this does not wholly dismiss the feeling that I have not fulfilled my part somehow. There are times, such as in *War and Peace*, when I evade my impartial spectator by avoiding direct invitation or the searching eyes of a performer; therefore, negating the need to formulate a response. Yet, I am also acutely aware that the more I commit to participation, the

more I am likely to experience in return; and it is this recognition that persuades an idealised “spectator within” to emerge.

The first appearance of my idealised spectator within occurred when I purchased my ticket. It is often at this moment when we must decide where we would like to be positioned in relation to the performance, and perhaps how we would wish to be seen. Tickets for *War and Peace* were priced between £14-16 and I selected the more expensive seats, close to the front row. This decision was primarily based on the fact that I wanted us (I was accompanied by three friends) to be seen by the company; therefore, increasing the possibility of being chosen for participation. This was not a popular decision with my friends, who complained because they don’t like participating, or the rest of the audience, as the front rows were noticeably unpopulated. In fact, before the performance was in full swing, the company encouraged spectators to move forward, with the assurance that they wouldn’t be made to participate. On the subject of the front row, it is at this juncture that I wish to introduce Erving Goffman’s related notion of “front” to analyse “the presentation of self” in the situation of participation.

Goffman determines that the impression given by an individual to observers is determined by ‘the expression that he *gives*, and the expression that he *gives off*.’ (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 14). In the first instance an impression is *given*, through the use of recognisable signs to convey information about one’s character to others. In the second occurrence the sign activity is indicative of the character, or *given off*, rather than intentionally expressed. However, it should be noted that an individual can deliberately misinform their audience through both use of signs, as Goffman observes: ‘the first involving deceit, the second feigning’ (Ibid). Goffman refers to the

expressiveness on an individual in the presence of others as a performance (Ibid., 32). His adoption of this theatrical term is suggestive of the correlation between the “spectator within” and “the presentation of self”, which I propose are brought together in his notion of “front”. He uses the label “front” to define the largely fixed element of an individual’s performance which works to manage the impression being made on those observing. As he states: ‘Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance’ (Ibid). Goffman determines that the performance of front can be divided into parts, which include setting, appearance and manner. According to Goffman, ‘setting’ refers to the scenery and stage props that frame the performance of front; ‘appearance’ concerns those personal signs which indicate the individual’s social status; and ‘manner’ relates to those signs which are indicative of the role that the individual expects to have in the unfolding event (Ibid., 32-35). Moreover, he acknowledges that we often expect some coherence between these three components of front (Ibid., 35). In other words, how an individual expresses themselves is typically governed by the concurrent tendencies of where they are, their social standing, and how they expect to be treated. It could also be said that relations amongst these three factors provide the basis on which the spectator within selects their social front and critiques the performance.

Goffman suggests that ‘fronts tend to be selected, not created’ (Ibid., 38), and ‘become institutionalised in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise’ (Ibid., 37). This resonates with the argument that as participatory performance develops into a popular art form; it becomes entrenched with preconceived ideas of how spectators should act. Nonetheless, following Goffman, the audience is

likely to find that there is a selection of fronts from which to choose, the most notable of which are the watching-spectator and the performing-spectator, although these positions will also be divided into a further assortment of fronts.

Returning to my own presence within the audience for *War and Peace*, instead of maintaining consistency between the varying parts of my front, my appearance and manner contradicted each other. The decision to purchase seats just a few rows back from the stage suggested an authoritative status instilled with a desire to be seen; however, my manner conveyed a lack of confidence and an expectation to be left alone. This contradictory behaviour can be traced back to the pre-performance of booking the tickets, wherein I attempted to present an idealised impression of myself as someone who is unabashed in their willingness to participate in live art. As Goffman illustrates, citing Charles Cooley, ‘If we never tried to seem a little better than we are, how could we improve or “train ourselves from the outside inward”?’ (Cooley 1922: 352-3 in Goffman 1990 [1959]: 44). However, despite my attempt to put on the front of an ideal spectator, in reality this was overwhelmed by my over analysis of the situation and inclination to be risk-averse.

Goffman’s analysis of the presentation of self from the perspective of a theatre performance makes specific reference to the “front” and “backstage” regions and the behaviour that they manifest. I suggest that these spaces and the different kinds of performance that they support are emphasised in the staging of both *Western Society* and *War and Peace*, in particular through the presence of the VIP/salon area. Goffman uses the term “front region” to describe the place where the performance is staged, which will typically include some ‘setting’. In this space the performer will usually

uphold certain standards, or what Goffman refers to as maintaining ‘decorum’. In the context of live art, as an art form with a penchant for challenging its audience’s sensibilities, the notion of ‘decorum’ to mean propriety and modesty does not hold much relevance. However, a second form of ‘decorum’ offered by Goffman, which he calls “make-work” can be usefully applied to Gob Squad’s practice.

This concept of “make-work” considers the activity taking place, which includes the requirement that workers will produce a certain amount of labour within a given time, and are able to give the impression that they are working hard at any given moment (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 112). In the front region of both Gob Squad productions, the Gob Squad performers and participants can be seen make-work. From the outset the audience is introduced to the task of producing a re-enactment of a given stimuli (A YouTube video in *Western Society* and Tolstoy’s novel in *War and Peace*), which suggests an expected amount of work to be made in the duration. The lack of an interval also implies that the work will be relentless in its attempt to achieve the desired result. The impression of making-work is emphasised further through the elaborate use of theatrical paraphernalia, specifically props and costume, as well as the embodiment of exaggerated techniques such as acting and dance. There are striking examples of this practice in *War and Peace*, most notably during the catwalk of Tolstoy characters which extends beyond the book and into popular culture; the solo ‘dance of history’ that Sharon performs; the repeatedly deconstructed scene between Napoleon and the Russian Tsar; and in the audition process for the novel’s much coveted role of Pierre Bezukhov, see Figure 14.



Figure 14: The audition for the role of Pierre Bezukhov.⁸²

Alongside his discussion on the staging of make-work, Goffman also introduces the representation of its counterpart: “make-no-work” (Ibid., 113). What follows is the suggestion that there are instances in the front region where individuals may wish to express the idea that they are not working (Ibid., 113-114). This sign activity is evident within the designated VIP/salon area of Gob Squad’s performances, where the performers can be observed removing elements of their costume (*Western Society*), taking refreshments, and chatting off script, in an attempt to represent not-performing or what Goffman refers to as “make-no-work”. Interestingly, Gob Squad’s actualisation of this concept takes place in the front region as Goffman infers; however, it occurs in a defined area which is signified as the back region or backstage (Ibid., 114). As Goffman tells us backstage knowingly contradicts the performance given out front. It is here that the production is assembled; where ‘illusions and impressions are openly constructed’ (Ibid), as wardrobe assistants make alterations to costume, and props are prepared for use. It is in this space that cast members can run lines, step out of character, update Facebook and tweet: they can drop their front stage “front”.

⁸² The source for this image is https://www.volksbuehne-berlin.de/praxis/en/war_and_peace

In *Western Society* Gob Squad employs the VIP area as a backstage space to cast the newly volunteered participant-spectators, as Smith explains:

[W]e invite the audience behind [the] set at the beginning, before they take their seats ... we want to kind of check them out, we get the opportunity to really carefully see who's making eye contact with us, who's looking too enthusiastic, who looks absolutely horrified at the idea that they're even on the stage etcetera. (2016: 10)

This invitation to go behind the set correlates with Goffman's envisaging of backstage as an area where a performer may assume their personal front; although, it should be noted that as long as others are present this will still be a front rather than their real self. Furthermore, I wish to emphasise that the successful casting of participant-spectators is largely dependent on the artist's ability to accurately interpret their front. In a conventional theatre situation, backstage is usually partitioned off from the front stage to maintain its secrets, specifically as the place where impressions are managed (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 116). However, in *Western Society* the audience bears witness to the fabrication of the performance to follow, as roles are cast and headphones distributed in plain view. In this way, it is not just the backstage that is exposed, but also the coexisting artifice of performance and social fronts. Indeed, this is one of the themes explored in *War and Peace*; for example in the explicit manufacturing of the social fronts presented by Napoleon, the Russian Tsar and Pierre Bezukhov, as we see their appearance and manner altered to affect the impression that each of them *gives* and *gives off*. The remote actors in *Western Society* are cast in the front that they must perform; still, as I indicated earlier, they must also write their part live in the moment. Their acting is not only dependant on the instructions that they receive through the headphones, but also their own inbuilt capacity to make judgements about their performance and adapt it accordingly. This realisation of the participant's "spectator

within” is mirrored in the watching-audience, who empathises with the participant by calling upon both emotion and reason. This relational dimension to participatory performance shifts ethical responsibility away from the self towards an ethical responsibility for someone else.

5.8 Ethics as Encounter

Ridout suggests that ‘ethics might in fact be all about everyone but yourself’ (2009: 13). Accordingly, this discussion will explore Ridout’s concept of “ethics as encounter”, which draws on Levinasian ethical thought (See Levinas 1969, 1989). As such, my analysis of ethics coincides with the discussions on co-presence that I developed in chapters three and four, specifically the consideration of Levinas’s concept of presence as a face-to-face exchange. For Ridout, Levinasian ethics applied to performance ‘encourages the spectator to stop seeing the performance as an exploration of his or her own subjectivity and, instead, to take it as an opportunity to experience an encounter with someone else’ (2009: 8). This is a philosophy which is epitomised in practice where an encounter with another is at the centre of the work, such as in one-to-one performance. Nonetheless, it is also fostered in Gob Squad’s use of participation, to strengthen the bond between those on stage and those seated in the auditorium. Smith defines this connection between performing-spectators and watching-spectators as:

the ability to relate to that person because they’ve left one part of the auditorium and they’ve gone to another part of the room ... they’ve crossed over that line. And they’ve kind of taken a little bit of the audience with them, so there’s a certain sort of extension of themselves maybe into the performance space.
(2016: 3)

Drawing on Goffman, I have talked about the way in which impressions are transmitted and contrived by an individual, employing his term “front”. Ridout also considers the idea of an “impression”, but as a type of bodily exchange between human beings which

produces what he refers to as “sympathy”. It should be highlighted that Ridout’s appropriation of “sympathy” derives from its use by Adam Smith (1723-1790) and other philosophers at that time, to convey a kind of physiological communication between people, and not a simple case of feeling sorry for someone (2009: 34-35). Ridout argues that because we all possess more or less the same qualities and feelings, an understanding of someone else’s situation can enact itself on an individual’s own person, which he calls an “impression”. In this doubling process what someone else is doing or feeling ‘is “impressed” upon me; it is like the action of a printing press on the surface of a body. As a result of this impression, I experience the feeling along with the other person. Literally, I feel the same thing ... from one body to another’ (2009: 34). For Ridout, the subsequent feeling of sympathy enables us to feel satisfaction when we perceive someone doing something good, or dissatisfaction when they imprint an act of wrong doing (Ibid). On this basis, he identifies that it is in our encountering of one another that human beings establish ‘a capacity for ethical judgement which is a natural extension of their existence as physiological beings’ (Ibid., 35). It might be reasoned that our predisposition for sympathy underlies our spectator within, as an inbuilt mechanism for assessing the way in which we might be judged by those on which we “impress”. This implies, as Ridout muses, that ethics is always in the end about someone else.

The interdependency between individual and relational ethics is actualised in Gob Squad’s question and answer sessions with participant-spectators, which is a feature of both works under discussion. In these moments, the interviewee-spectator will instantly separate themselves into two roles; first, they need to assess how to respond to the question; secondly, they must refer their response inwards to their impartial spectator.

For the spectator within, this is a self-reflexive process based on their previous communication with others. In short, ethics as encounter fuels the ethical judgement within us. When in a Q&A situation, there is an almost instantaneous process of improvising our answer and filtering that answer based on the impression that we would wish to make. This process coincides with the duality of emotion and reason that underscore ethical judgement. Of course, there are times when our ability to be spontaneous hinders the effectiveness of our impression. There are also instances when our impartial spectator gets it wrong, which might occur when we are not familiar with the other people that are in attendance, thus, misjudging what the reception will be. Then there are those situations when an individual wilfully goes against the ethical code generally accepted by others, as discussed in the next section.

I propose that Ridout's notion of "sympathy" is made stronger when the person on stage belongs to the same "team" as the watching-spectator. Reflecting on participation in Gob Squad's performance, Smith contemplates, 'once somebody does go in, you tend to think about yourself don't you? Like how would I feel if that was me ... you're on the same team ... you're kind of gunning for them' (2016: 8). The concept of "teams" is usefully explored by Goffman, who uses the term "team": 'to refer to any set of individuals who cooperate in staging a single routine' (1990 [1959]: 85). In this way, the audience can be understood as a team, even if the team-mates perform varying roles on a continuum of interactivity. For Goffman, 'whether the members of a team stage similar individual performances or stage dissimilar performances which fit together into a whole, an emergent team impression arises' (Ibid). Yet, as Goffman observes, it is clear that members of the same team will have a notable relationship to each other, as each member is reliant on the good behaviour of their team-mates, establishing a 'bond

of reciprocal dependence' (Ibid., 88). Furthermore, this cooperation is reinforced by a given 'reciprocal familiarity', which 'is automatically extended and received as soon as the individual takes a place on the team' (Ibid). However, Goffman is clear to point out that should a person go outside the boundaries of acceptable team behaviour or what we might call ethics, 'giving the show away or forcing it to take a particular turn', he is still considered part of the team (Ibid). Indeed, it is the person's membership of the team that makes their actions all the more disruptive (Ibid., 89); I will discuss this further in the subsequent section. This reinforces my assertion that even when spectators cross the border and undertake a performance role, they are nonetheless part of "Team Audience". Furthermore, part of the performing-spectators' dramatic effect comes from the fact that they appear to be acting beyond the pale of the team's typical behaviour; therefore, requiring the other members to reconsider their own conduct. However, as I have previously mentioned, I suggest that on the other side of the border the participant-spectators form a new team, which complicates rather than abolishes their membership of Team Audience. This is instead of the view that the volunteers temporarily join the team of performers, which I refute on the basis that they are only given access to the front region. Even when the stage includes part of the back region, as we find in Gob Squad's practice, it is a theatricalised representation of behind the scenes and not the backstage proper.

In Goffman's hypothesising, the constitution of a team with its 'reciprocal dependence' cuts across social and political divides, which is also a claim made on behalf of practitioners that employ audience participation. In chapter three, I highlighted the way that Abramović recognised her art as bringing people together who would not ordinarily share the same space (KunstSpektrum 2014); similarly, Gob Squad draw

attention to the idea that the performing-spectators are people that otherwise may not come into contact. Yet, as I have outlined, the new bonds formed between participants in the “new world” do not deny the pre-existing bonds that they have with the audience. Additionally, according to Goffman, when two teams come into contact they tend to maintain their established appearance, as well as supporting the impression that the other team are keen to uphold. However, the relationship between the teams may be reorganised during moments of crisis (Goffman 1990 [1959]: 166). Chapter three noted how audience participation may be interpreted as a form of social crisis, in the way that the original social distance between the performers and the audience is decreased. Yet, as Goffman suggests, ‘when the crisis is past, the previous working consensus is likely to be re-established, albeit bashfully’ (Ibid). I am reminded of that awkward feeling post-participation when you bump into a performer in the real world. It is striking how quickly intimacy dissipates once the show is over. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the presence of intimacy in the encounter itself, either embodied or impressed upon us. In the newly formed team of performing-spectators an impression is quickly established, which is largely focused on compliance and the realisation of “giving good audience”. However, there are moments when both performing-spectators and watching-spectators demonstrate forms of communication which deviate from the agreed team impression.

5.9 Participation Gone Wrong: The “errant spectator”, the “mis-spectator”, and the “dis-spectator”

At this stage of the chapter I will turn my attention to a number of moments within my encountering of *Western Society* and *War and Peace* where spectators appeared to transgress the boundaries of participation. The notion of participation “gone wrong”

refers to when spectators divert from their intended role and the parameters set out by the artist. Until now, I have focused on the principles and processes of participation, which to a large extent safeguard against the potential for things to go wrong. However, I propose that it is often when things don't go to plan that participation gets really interesting, in terms of social relations and ethics. In general, practitioners do what they can to limit the possibility of the performance going wrong, which typically includes some form of informal casting. In *War and Peace* this process was made explicit through the initial interviewing of audience members; whereas, in *Western Society* the randomness of the selection method appeared to disregard a need for casting. Yet, Smith has suggested that when "chucking those toys" there are people to avoid. Furthermore, participants undergo a form of audition with a member of the crew when they are given their headphones. It is during this time that the re-enactment parts are handed out by the tour manager. As Smith explains, "he gets a moment with them in the dark side, he can see then if somebody looks terribly nervous, or if somebody looks a little bit too eager. And he can kind of sort them out a little bit' (2016: 10). Still, despite an artist's best efforts, there are times when miss-casting or misbehaviour occurs.

In the performance of *Western Society* that I attended, there were two striking instances of a spectator making a mistake; both of which resulted in much humour and exceeded the effect that participation had on the watching-audience. In the first example, Mr "Does that mean I have to go up" - cast as the Cake Lady - ate the cake before he was given the cue, resulting in a hearty applause from the audience. In the second instance, a young male remote actor corpsing infected the whole auditorium with the giggles. These spectators might be looked on as "errant audience members", to use Alston's term, in the way that they strayed from the intended course (2016: 65).

Following Alston's notion of errant immersion, the mistakes made by Mr 'Does that mean I have to go up' and his giggling co-performer are '*mistakes that make*' (Alston 2016a: 67 emphasis original). In Alston's theorising, this making emerges from 'a surplus of expertise, reading too well and taking too far an invitation to get involved' (Ibid). While this view might be applied to the over enthusiastic Cake Lady, it is not relevant to the example of corpsing, which conversely suggests a lack of expertise or engagement. All the same, inexpertise might also be seen as offering *mistakes that make*. As Ridout states: 'a measure of inexpertise may be crucial to an interruption of the consensus around value to which experts, both performance makers and spectators, routinely contribute, a consensus in which we agree only to see and hear what we already know' (2012: 173). For Ridout, this consensus coincides with what Rancière refers to as "the distribution of the sensible" (2009), inasmuch as it constitutes an aesthetic order which imposes a value system on which we base judgements and determine who gets to be called an expert (Ibid). Ridout identifies his conception of the "mis-spectator" as capable of realising Rancière's reconfiguration of this consensus: 'to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals' (Rancière 2009: 24-5 in Ridout 2012: 174). In this way, Ridout notes that the inexpert spectator bears a resemblance to Rancière's "emancipated spectator", as the producer of their own story (2012, 174; see also Rancière 2007: 279).

I wish to propose that all mistakes can be *mistakes that make*, and not just for the maker of the mistake, who I'm quite sure enjoyed the laughs that they received, but also for the perceiver of the mistake. For me, those disruptions to the course of *Western Society* were highlights because they emphasised the authenticity of the performing-

spectators and the potential risks of staging participation. It is my assertion that part of the appeal of participation is the risk of transgression and failure, which is implicit in the invitation for non-professionals to take to the stage. This risk is not only understood by those that accept the invitation, but by the watching audience, who assume a certain level of responsibility for the performance through their very attendance and as teammates of the participants. Although, as I have indicated, a participant's misbehaviour often creates the illusion of failure rather than failure itself, as these moments of undoing are capable of creating a performance that is far more entertaining and genuine than what was originally intended. Misbehaviour and mistakes emphasise the unrehearsed nature of participation because they remind us that even when there are imposed limits, these may be breached.

A striking example of audience transgression in participatory performance occurred during *War and Peace*; the likes of which I have not seen before or since. This moment interrupted the consensus of the audience, represented a crisis in the ethics of participation, and brought acute attention to the expert participant-spectator. The behaviour on display during this unruly exchange converges with elements of Alston's errant audience member and Ridout's inexpert figure. However, I propose that it more accurately fits with a third category of transgressive spectatorship, which I have called the "dis-spectator". It could be said that the trouble began in the casting, or what might be considered miss-casting, as over the course of *War and Peace* it transpired that one of the chosen performing-spectators had been a political party candidate during the previous General Election. Consequently, when Gob Squad's Simon asked the participant a series of questions, she offered very full responses and seemed to have her own agenda, taking up quite a lot of stage time and appearing difficult for him to rein in.

This prompted a group of three audience members, who were sitting in front of me, to heckle her, shouting comments and insisting that she speed up her answers. I propose that the three hecklers demonstrate the behaviour of the dis-spectator. The “dis” derives from the term “dissent” and the closely related “dissident”; it refers to the notion of a spectator who has dissented from the majority of the audience and is actively challenging the established structures and processes of the performance. Unlike the errant spectator or the mis-spectator there is nothing mistaken about the actions of the dis-spectator, whose deliberate actions are inclined to *break*, rather than *make* a performance. Of course, this form of spectatorship exists on a continuum; at the lowest level the dis-spectator can be seen questioning an immersive performer on their back story to try to catch them out; whereas at the highest level the dis-spectator may stage an intervention that threatens to undo the whole performance or redirect the focus to their agenda. I suggest that an invitation to participate can bring out the “dis-spectator within us”, especially when fuelled with hedonistic and narcissistic desire. Yet, typically this operates at a playful level, with a view to have a bit of fun rather than to create discord.

In *War and Peace*, the disorderly behaviour of the hecklers created a palpable tension within the auditorium, crossing the border into the performance. It was apparent that neither the audience nor the performers knew what to do. And, it would be dishonest if I didn’t admit that there was something thrilling about watching this crisis unfold: witnessing Simon struggling to rein in the overzealous interviewee, at the same time as attempting to ignore the shouts from the disgruntled observers. It magnified the liveness of the experience, and arguably reconfigured the performance as a space for discord and “antagonism”. Yet, despite the revolutionary possibilities, I found the

heckling rude and oppressive, and my sympathy and allegiance was whole heartedly with my team mate on stage. Thankfully she appeared unmoved by the abuse directed at her; no doubt a thick skin earned through her campaigning as a politician. Though I had felt that she was somewhat overplaying her part, I continued to support her as a member of Team Audience. The heckling that she endured demonstrated one of the greatest fears of participation: the idea that you might get it wrong and be booed off stage. But, how did she get it wrong, and what were the hecklers trying to achieve? Putting aside the possibility that the hecklers knew her in some way, I suggest that her front indicated a lack of authenticity or vulnerability. In this way, her professionalism denied the audience the celebrated impression of the amateur as an artist. While her appearance and manner suggested an expert participant-spectator; in contrast, the fact that she was unable to underplay her public front suggested inexpertness in participatory performance. Whether cast as an errant spectator who surpassed her role, or as a mis-spectator who overestimated how much to say, perhaps in the eyes of the hecklers she threatened the consensus of the performance. To this end, we may conclude that the hecklers sought to reclaim control of the performance for the audience, but also on behalf of the performers – to *break* in order to *make*. Following Goffman, it may be that their interruption was intended to reprimand their team member for going outside of the typical standards of participation. However, the paradox of their protest is that it brought more discord to the performance, and created a rupture in the ethics of participation.

As such, audience members and Gob Squad performers alike were compelled to question who is responsible for the performance; who is responsible for the performing-spectator; who is responsible for the hecklers; how do we bring resolution to this

situation; do we want to resolve this situation or is this what we have been waiting for? After all, as Ridout tells us: 'Theatre's greatest ethical potential may be found precisely at the moment when theatre abandons ethics' (2009: 70). Though I want to stress that the situation of hecklers in *War and Peace* is very rare, for me, it evidences that the ethics of participation remains contested ground, fraught with conflicting notions of responsibility and impression management. It was striking that no-one intervened when the dis-spectators collectively berated the participant-spectator, not the audience, not Gob Squad, and not the theatre ushers. The company discusses how they use a raw form of narration to maintain authenticity over their text and to be able to 'react to spontaneous heckling from the audience' (Gob Squad 2010: 46); however, they seemed unprepared for the heckling directed at their co-participant. While participation may be conceived by its makers as the "opening up of a border", the breaking of the fourth wall, or the unlocking of a gate from their side, little attention has been given to what happens if the border/wall/gate is breached from the other side.

5.10 Conclusion

Hélène Cixous considers that 'Feeling pleasure means losing oneself' (1991: 152). I propose that the ethics of participation reward those that risk losing themselves to pleasure (or being heckled) with special privileges including greater access to the secrets of the performance and elevated social status. However, Gob Squad's practice draws self-reflexive critical attention to the artifice of participation as a privileged position, and how participants might be manipulated or made vulnerable. All at once their approach to spectatorship recognises and magnifies the enabling and limiting potential produced by participation. The shared curtain call with participants is a testament to Gob Squad's emancipation rather than exploitation of spectators, while

unreservedly upholding Rancière's claim that emancipation can also be found by remaining in your seat.

This chapter has established that the ethics of participation is about one's own subjectivity, and at the same time it is about our encounters with others. It has demonstrated the function of the three teams (company performers, performing-spectators, and watching-spectators) in Gob Squad's work, and highlighted the way that they interchange roles and determine their own interdependent ethical codes. My analysis has recognised how the ethics of participation raises the stakes in performance, bringing into view the errant spectator, the mis-spectator, and the dis-spectator.

Nevertheless, I suggest that ethical promiscuity is part of participation's vitality, which is in danger of being compromised if its ethics become too formulaic and spectators' responses learnt. If there is one attribute that the ethics of participation insists upon, it is the capacity to spontaneously stage one's authentic self. This serves as a reaction and resistance to the concurrent rise of the network society; where impressions are filtered on Instagram and fronts are managed through Facebook updates and retweets. In this way, the ethical imperfections of our world have been impressed upon participatory performance, as the ethics, aesthetics and politics of Western society continue to circumvent both war and peace.

Chapter Six: Final Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This thesis has developed a theoretical framework for the analysis of spectator-participation in live art by examining the performance practices of Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *La Pocha Nostra*, Marina Abramović, and Gob Squad. It has offered new insights on the possibilities and limitations of these experiential performances, drawing on both scholarly investigation and embodied research. As I stated at the beginning of the thesis, my interest in participation arose out of a need to resolve my experience as a performing-spectator. Subsequently, this framework serves to disentangle the transformative processes and possible side effects of participation, so that we might better comprehend these complex and contradictory encounters.

It is 'the morning after (the night before)', and we are waking up to the full consequences and potentialities of participation. In fact, the period of time over which this thesis has been researched and written serves to reflect how the field of immersive and participatory practices has developed, in particular, the way that the focus has shifted from relational aesthetics to the complicity of participation in a neoliberal culture. However, I suggest that there is still a need to drill down into the research at a more detailed level. To this end, the framework presented in this thesis takes a fresh look at the phenomenology of participatory live art. It advances on from "the emancipated spectator", as outlined by Jacques Rancière, to reconsider its meaning within live art. It examines the relationship between ritual and the transformative and emergent processes that foster and manage participation. Furthermore, responding to a dearth of literature, it recognises presence and ethics as foundational concepts in the

development of participation. Moreover, the study establishes spectator-participation as a practice in its own right, and charts the birth of a new breed of spectator who anticipates the possibility of co-creation. It recognises several emerging types of participant, namely the “expert participant-spectator” and the more transgressive “dis-spectator”. While determining that participation can offer spectators a licence to act in ways outside of their everyday political and social reality, it calls attention to the lack of consideration and after-care given to spectators post-participation.

In addition, the way in which these arguments are elucidated through the close analysis of performances by the case study artists and companies, underlines the contribution that they have made to the field. A particular highlight in the research is my interview with Gob Squad’s Sharon Smith (2016), and her insightful reading of spectators as “refugees seeking asylum”, artists as the custodians of the “gate”, and participation as the key to opening the border.

Even though my analysis concentrates on specific case study performances, I maintain that the discussions and concepts to emerge out of these encounters are transferable to other participatory works inside and outside of live art. Indeed, accepting Lois Keidan’s suggestion that live art is the research lab for mass culture (2015), looking at these practices and audiences may reveal the ways in which we can expect the mainstream to develop in the future. In this concluding chapter I will highlight the major insights and implications of the study, and the future areas for investigation.

6.2 Researcher and Narrator

Chapter one noted a tendency in the literature that I reviewed towards a separation between a theoretical analysis of participatory experience and the *experience itself*.

Therefore, I sought to take a holistic approach to the analysis of the case study performances, by adopting the triple perspective of the spectator, the performance maker, and the scholar. An important feature of the research was my own Spectator-Participation-as-Research (SPaR), which enabled my encounters to have a presence within the study. The use of photographs throughout the thesis is also part of this desire to capture the work itself, while recognising that these images also take on their own presence as “the document performance” (Schneider 117-120 in Brine and Minton 2008). I came to realise as the investigation developed that the anecdotes were not just an introduction to the performances but pivotal to identifying the academic lines of enquiry to be pursued. As a result, throughout the thesis I have maintained a dialogue with the *experiences themselves*, alongside and in conjunction with the theoretical conversations that take place.

Early on in the study, I identified how the tendency amongst academics to combine anecdote and scholarly writing mirrors the duality of the performer/spectator role and the condition of being inside/outside of participatory performance at the same time. In this way, participation can be seen to turn researchers in the field into narrators, realising Rancière’s notion of an emancipated community as a community of storytellers (2007: 280). Yet, typically there is a paradox here, as the emphasis on the creation of a community is undermined by the way that scholarly reflections concentrate on an *individual* journey (Aragay and Monforte 2016: 8 emphasis original). This coincides with my realisation in chapter three, drawing on the work of Rachel Gomme (2015), that although participatory performances may seem to offer a shared experience with another, in actuality they are much more about an encounter with the self.

Another insight revealed in chapter three came about as a consequence of my adoption of three perspectives within La Pocha Nostra's work; as a performing-spectator, watching-spectator, and collaborative artist. This approach revealed a unique perspective on the interrelationship between the different roles within participatory performance, what it feels like from both sides of the border and the position of being indeterminately in-between the two.

6.3 The Rise in Participatory Live Art

In addressing the function of participatory live art, I have established how an aesthetic of participation has arisen out of a contemporary social and cultural context. As a result, the thesis highlights the ways in which participation can be socially and politically enabling, but also limiting. Tracing the origins of participation in live art, I noted how the resurgence towards this practice at the turn of the twenty-first century was a reaction to an increasingly mediated and depoliticised society. I also emphasised the important role that Home Live Art (HLA) played in this revival, and how support for this work has continued with the Live Art Development Agency (LADA). I suggest that as the world's leading organisation for live art, LADA is instrumental in elevating certain types of practice. But, we do need to be careful that the discourses, events and resources that are promoted by the agency reflect the artists that come under its remit, rather than the institution driving the artistic agenda.

I have concluded that over the last ten years, the proliferation in participatory works has developed concurrently with our advancement into the era of the social network, driven by the continued growth in smartphone usage. While Facebook may report that we have more friends than we could ever recall, for many of us there is a sense that our

“real” self has become even more isolated. We live in an age where the notion of ‘to be or not to be’ has become synonymous with ‘to tweet or not to tweet’ (Jones 2012: 155). Yet, in contrast to artists’ perception of a depoliticised society at the turn of the Millennium, social networks have in fact re-politicised society, playing a key role in recent political campaigns.

Social networks currently portray a divided nation, as many turn to online platforms to continue fraught political debates, and to share their frustration at voting results which seek to further discriminate against marginalised bodies. Consequently, I suggest that along with the participatory desires of hedonism and narcissism noted by Adam Alston (2013), enthusiasm for this work replicates theatre’s sensitivity to social feeling and action. Furthermore, as I outlined in chapter three, these performances might be interpreted as modern day social dramas and rites of passage, which possess a capacity to treat our acute emptiness and social crisis with artistic experience. This converges with a yearning desire to physically experience a sense of togetherness and the presence of our own life, as well as creating a ‘space for speech’ (Fisher 2011: 25) in which alternative social and political realities might be staged. The case study performances bear witness to the way in which participation can foster a genuine exchange between bodies, unite strangers, and heighten one’s attendance. In response to the acceleration of social media as the *modus operandi* for human interaction, I suggest that we need the kind of human connection founded in participatory experience now more than ever.

Nevertheless, my research has demonstrated that these experiential works can also be limiting. Above all, although it is capable of destabilising established hierarchical structures including the notion of the artist over the spectator, participation can be

socially divisive, producing a new pecking order of spectatorship that privileges doing over seeing. One of the insights to emerge from my analysis of La Pocha Nostra's practice, in chapter three, is the way in which the role of the watching-directing-spectator challenges this arrangement, by demonstrating that seeing *is* doing. However, in my consideration of Abramović's *512 Hours*, discussed in chapter four, I followed Claire Bishop's argument (2008, 2004) that participation can create a spectacle of sociability rather than a more sustainable or antagonistic form of engagement. Still, at the same time, the way in which this public experiment brought disparate people together evidences how these exchanges can represent a form of passive and imaginative resistance. Overall, I conclude that participatory live art, notwithstanding its limitations, has an important job to do. An aesthetic of participation arises out of a need to attend to our "real" self; to nurture an embodied sense of mutuality and community; and to create a 'space for speech' in which we might envisage a new social and political future, albeit in a language co-written by the artist.

6.4 Emancipating Spectators

In this thesis, Rancière's concept of "the emancipated spectator" (2007, 2009) has influenced my argument, but I have moved beyond this theory in my analysis of emancipating spectators in live art. In doing so, I have identified how a live art audience has a different set of conventions and expectations from a theatre audience.

Consequently, the live art spectator anticipates the potential for an embodied response as well as a critical one, with participation merely extending those expectations.

Moreover, in the performances under discussion, the image of an emancipated spectator being freed from their seat in a darkened auditorium is only applicable to Gob Squad's *Western Society* and *War and Peace*. Significantly, these two performances draw self-

reflexive critical attention to the idea of an emancipated spectator as a privileged and VIP spectator.

I conclude that the emancipated spectator in live art is largely directed at the binary of activity and passivity. In this way, the spectator is reconceived as a co-creator, who has agency to affect the production of the performance through their creative responses. This mode of emancipation is designed to empower spectators and give them autonomy over their participatory experience. The live art community has a particular sensitivity towards a democratising of the arts, as many of the artists and spectators have felt marginalised and disenfranchised from mainstream culture and politics. While live art has provided a creative space in which artists can openly share their personal and political viewpoints, participation has been adopted as the vehicle for empowering and emancipating their audience.

Nevertheless, the thesis has also demonstrated how participation may in fact be extorted from the spectator, who is primed to have a special complicity (Alston 2013: 129; see also Fried 1968: 127) with the practice. This resonates with the arguments put forward by Bishop (2008) and Jen Harvie (2013) that delegated performance may produce an exploited spectator instead of an emancipated one. Although I would not go as far as to say that the spectators in the case study works are deliberately taken advantage of, the agency that they are afforded may in fact be what Astrid Breel refers to as the display of agency, and sometimes it is hard to know the difference. In short, the emancipation of spectators in live art, more often than not, comes with sanctions. Nevertheless, while this may impose some limits on the creative possibilities of the practice and its outcome, it also serves to safeguard the aesthetic of the work and the

audience's role within it. Therefore, if we interpret these works as deploying *an aesthetic of risk*, the guidelines that frame participation might be considered as a form of risk-management. In addition, to echo Rachel Zerihan (2009), the spectator might actually experience a form of emancipation as a consequence of the scaffold for participation set out by the artist, which authorises them to behave in a particular way without having to take responsibility for their actions. Yet, as I have discussed in relation to 'the morning after' participation, the spectator's ability to hold themselves accountable for their behaviour may well be suspended rather than released.

In my consideration of Rancière's emancipated spectator from a more distant position to the performance, I have reasoned that the watching-spectator is actively involved in the translation of the complex scenes and "irresistible images" (Bogad 2015) unfolding from participation. Still, as Wilkinson (2015) considers, the shared cultural values, narrative conventions and collective memory between spectators influences how watching-spectators process their personal experience. In this way, 'Rancière's active spectator is never an isolated subject' (Wilkinson 2015: 142). This challenges Rancière's concept of the emancipated spectator as 'an actor in *his* own story' (Rancière 2007: 279 emphasis mine), which leads me to propose that a more radical emancipation of the spectator is needed if we are to create new stories and new endings.

Importantly, although my experiences as a watching-spectator afforded me the distance to critique the performances that I witnessed, they did not produce the same intense embodied experience that the performing-spectator role had brought forth. In this way, I am inclined to suggest that if there is a main principle for spectator-

participation in live art and beyond, it is this: the more that is given in participation, the more that is taken in participation, for both the artist and the spectator.

In moving beyond Rancière's theory, I have gained another insight into the emancipated spectator, resulting from the transformative capacity of participatory live art, wherein the spectator is released from their everyday self and social reality. In the case study performances, we have seen how this can be brought about through both physical and mental processes. In *La Pocha Nostra's* human mural exercise, performing-spectators are transformed through costume, props and their active decision making in the shaping of the improvisation. While immersed in play they are able to relinquish their normal responsibilities and "front" (Goffman 1959). In *Gob Squad's* remote acting, even though participants are literally controlled by the performers, the requirement to follow the instructions being communicated gives them a licence to do things that ordinarily they might not do, with the defence that the performance made them do it. Lastly, in Marina Abramović's *512 Hours* a combination of physical and mental activities work towards emancipating spectators from the world outside, in what might be thought of as a form of imaginative immersion, where the mind rather than the performance space takes the spectator to another place. In sum, my analysis of the different modes of spectatorship within the case study performances determines that there is more than one way of emancipating spectators in participatory live art. However, at the same time I have highlighted the mixed emotions that can follow emancipation and called attention to the lack of consideration and after-care given to spectators post-participation.

6.5 A “Symmathesy” (living system) of Participation in Live Art

The thesis offers a new way of looking at the phenomenology of participatory live art by determining these encounters as a complex network of contradictory and interdependent relations. Accordingly, it argues that these performances constitute a “symmathesy” of participation, to use Nora Bateson’s term, which should be viewed as a whole experience rather than as a series of parts. In chapter three, I established what I am calling “the paradox of participation”: the duality of holding the position of performer and spectator, inside and outside of the performance, and being both and neither at the same time. The research upholds that there are contradictory couplings in participation including the interplay between autonomy and heteronomy, emancipation and compliance, ordinary and extraordinary, experience and memory, experience and documentation, destiny and surprise, emotion and reason, risk and responsibility, self and other. Reflection on my own encounters prevents me from accepting Laura Cull’s (2011) reading of ontological participation as an immanent encounter which denies the existence of an outside position. However, consistent with Cull’s view, I suggest that we do need to alter the systemic way in which we think about participation. While the paradox of participation complicates our perception of the experience, it is ultimately the thing that holds the work together. As such, the thesis proposes that the mind and the body are not in opposition during participation but interdependent, enabling us to fulfil our responsibility to the performance, to safeguard the experience, and to take care of our role within it. Furthermore, it is the symbiosis of the mind and body during participation that enables the spectator to become an “embodied mind” within their own presence (Fischer-Lichte 2008).

One can also apply the notion of interdependency to the other paradoxical relations in the situation of participation, which enables us to observe paradox without needing to choose one side or the other, as Nora Bateson notes (2016: 170). This corresponds with Fischer-Lichte's theory on the "reenchantment" of participant-spectators, in which the perception of binaries as an "either/or" situation is replaced by the condition of "as well as" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 207). Drawing on Bateson, I suggest that to only perceive of participation as a series of 'parts' blinds us to the way in which these relational pairs operate within the emergent process of participation. Therefore, I have adopted Bateson's term "symmathesy" as a new concept to describe the communication of interdependency and mutual learning that occurs in participation as a 'whole' living system (2016: 168). I propose that our understanding of participatory live art can be advanced through this new terminology, which better reflects the complex interactions that take place within these live works.

6.6 Spectator-Participation as a Practice

Looking at the implications of this research for performance makers, the thesis has shown how working with a live and participating audience can be a difficult responsibility to manage. Nonetheless, as I said in chapter two, I am wary of advocating a "dramaturgy of participation" or a training field for the performers of this work, as suggested by Persis Jade Maravala and Jorge Lopes Ramos (2016). I have cautioned that if we are too didactic about how participation operates, we may produce the presentation of participation rather than a meaningful invitation to engage in the work. I have even suggested that live art may be the custodian of participatory practice as an artistic experience, rather than as a commercial one.

However, at the same time, I propose that we do need to recognise that spectator-participation is a nuanced practice in its own right, which requires a specific set of understandings. Indeed, this thesis charts the birth of a new breed of spectator, whose expectations, needs and behaviour have evolved alongside the advancement of participatory practice. In chapter three, I acknowledged how this has given rise to the appearance of the “expert participant-spectator”, adding another tier to the hierarchy of spectatorship. In chapter five, I distinguished three transgressive types of participant-spectator: the “errant spectator” (Alston 2016a), the “mis-spectator” (Ridout 2012), and my own concept of the “dis-spectator”. These spectator roles epitomise the element of risk and potential for failure that underscores participation, emphasising its liveness and making it an exciting place to be. I follow Alston to conclude that mistakes and misdemeanours can in actuality *make* rather than *break* a performance. At the same time, reflecting on the heckling during Gob Squad’s *War and Peace*, I recommend that artists are better equipped to manage these kinds of situations, and are clearer on where their duty of care to a participant begins and ends.

For emerging practitioners of participation, chapter three examines the practical processes and techniques that underscore fostering participation. The chapter has mapped the development of participation in the interactive rituals and extreme performance games of La Pocha Nostra, using these labels as conceptual frames through which to analyse their performance methodology. This simultaneously provides a potential structure for performance makers to follow, which suggests the building blocks towards fostering “productive participation” without being too prescriptive. My examination finds many shared characteristics between ritual practice and participatory performance, and elucidates how strategies and tactics are employed by artists to garner

the audience's "special complicity". This includes outlining a set of theatrical devices, pinpointed by Fischer-Lichte (2008), that create a heightened level of awareness in the spectator. I have identified a distinguishing feature of audience participation in these live art works as their ability to transform the ordinary, not into the extra-ordinary (more than ordinariness), but into the extraordinary (unusual).

6.7 Presence and Ethics

This study proposes that presence is foundational to the process and effect of participation. It concludes that the emerging nature of form in participatory performance converges with the evolving manifestations of presence that it produces. Chapter four's exploration of presence in Marina Abramović's *512 Hours* highlights how the attendance of the artist and the spectator is magnified through participation.

It observes how against the backdrop of "the experience economy" (Pine and Gilmore 1999) there is a perceived value of *being there*, which is epitomised by the selfie. Indeed, this is indicative of participatory performance's paradoxical relationship to technology. On the one hand, these live exchanges serve to represent a counterculture to a technology based society. On the other hand, they appropriate online platforms as the place to brag, document, extend, relive, romanticise and even decompress from one's experience. Moreover, the social reality perceived by participants during the original performance may even be superseded by a social media reality of the experience.

In my examination of presence I determine that a heightened state of being arises from the expectant bodies of both the artist and the audience, especially when there is a demand to do something. I emphasise how the artist's "auratic presence" (Cormac

Power 2008) or what might be referred to as a “strong concept of presence” (Fischer-Lichte 2008) channels the energy between the bodies within the performance space. In Abramović’s case this is directly related to her celebrity-artist status and perceived superhuman qualities, as well as deriving from the nuances of her performance training.

I also conclude that the artist’s own embodied presence returns a feeling of embodiment to her spectators, articulated by Fischer-Lichte (2008) as a kind of PRESENCE: PRESENCE. This corresponds to Sharon Smith’s notion of the audience as a projection screen, actualised in the staged duality of the Gob Squad performer and their counterpart remote actor, as well as between performing-spectators and watching-spectators. Furthermore, I draw on Josephine Machon’s theory of (syn)aesthetics (2009) to highlight that when we are reminded of a previous participatory encounter our body recalls the sensation, extending the experience and contributing to its addictive capacity.

Lastly, I have ascertained how participation constitutes the co-presence of the artist, performing-spectator and watching-spectator. Echoing Rachel Gomme (2015), my reflection has testified that it is through the mutual exchange between co-participants with equal status, rather than between the artist and spectator, that a shared experience of intimacy comes into being. Additionally, I have established how Heidegger’s concept of “out-standing standing-within” (1978) interpreted by Simon Jones, and the related notion of “neighboring nearness” (1971) offer a theoretical framework for understanding the way in which we perceive the other’s ‘othering’ in the situation of participation (Simon Jones 2012: 170). More importantly, the way that “out-standing standing-within” is characterised by the condition of ‘knowing’ at the same time as ‘not-knowing’ is usefully developed in Levinas’s writing, to contend that our

encountering of the mystery of another is ‘always in action and never done’ (S Jones 2012: 164). Therefore, the thesis concludes that participation eventually turns the encounter back in on itself, to manifest as a self-encounter.

The emergent nature of presence coincides with a mutable code of ethics within participatory performance in live art. Chapter five draws on Ridout (2009) to reason that there is a double dimension to the ethics of participation: one is concerned with the self, and the other is about everyone else. Furthermore, I have concluded that an underlying principle in the ethics of participation appears to be an ability to stage one’s authenticity at will. It is surprising that as *an aesthetic of risk*, more research has not been dedicated to the study of ethics within these complicated works. Certainly, an ethical ambiguity has opened participation up to criticism, especially regarding the exploitative potential of this work. Nevertheless, paralleling my argument against ‘the dramaturgy of participation’, I suggest that ethical promiscuity is part of participation’s vitality, which is in danger of being compromised if it becomes too fixed. Still, at the same time, I argue that artists have an ethical responsibility to take care of their spectators during and after their participatory experience.

6.8 Future Areas for Investigation

This thesis has provided a comprehensive overview of research on participation in live art, as well as addressing some of the gaps in the literature. But, there is still work to do. The conversations concerning the “symmathesy” of binary relations, and the discourse on presence and ethics are indicative of the complex nature of these concepts, and as such they invite further critical and philosophical readings to offer a deeper insight into their role within participation. One area of further investigation that I have drawn

attention to at various points in this study is the way in which participatory performance practices converge with the characteristics and ethos of rave and club culture that emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s. On the emerging field of spectator-participation as a practice in its own right, it would be useful to extend the analysis and data on audience behaviour, to have a better awareness of their changing needs, expectations, and sensibilities. There is also the question of how the audience values participatory works. If it is a case of a performance being effective rather than good, as Gómez-Peña suggests (2005: 25), how is this measured? What are the criteria by which this is judged? Lastly, I propose that we have a responsibility to further consider the consequences of participation and the after-care that should be given to spectators post-participation.

Deeper reflection on my own participatory experiences, in relation to the critical concepts and debates that I have unravelled over the duration of this study, has shifted my thinking back and forth. At best participation can make the spectator feel empowered, emancipated, and even “special”, but at worst it can make one feel inadequate, manipulated and expendable. It is ‘the morning after (the night before)’, and I have uncovered the complexities, contradictions, pleasures and pitfalls of participatory live art; to conclude, that it is one of the most dynamic and fruitful fields of performance around today.

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Appendix 1

This is a transcript of a Skype interview that I conducted with Gob Squad member, Sharon Smith, which took place on 1 July 2016.

word

Emphasis on word

KJ

As discussed, I'm recording this interview, but if at any stage you didn't want me to record it any further, you're well within your rights to say, "okay I don't want this recording." If you want me to delete it all, that again is completely your right. And if I intend to publish anything then I will check it with you first and let you have a look at it before anything is out there in the public domain, if that's okay.

SS

Okay, yeah.

KJ

Right, okay, good. So, I think I explained in my email that my PhD is on audience participation in live art.

SS

Yeah.

KJ

So, as I'm sure you've seen, there has been a rise in popularity with all things participatory. And so this research stems from my own experience of audience participation and thinking about what that means as a spectator. And I'm looking at three case studies, you are one of the case studies and then there are Marina Abramović and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *La Pocha Nostra*, who I have worked with and performed with.

SS

Okay.

KJ

And the title of it is 'The Morning After the Night Before: Emancipating Spectators in Live Art'. So it's taking an open-eyed look at what participation means, now. Gob Squad was an early adopter of audience participation in contemporary performance, beginning, with *Room Service* in 2003. What was the original impulse for directly working with the audience?

SS

We wanted to bring somehow the real world inside the theatre, or still have a connection to the outside via some sort of media or technology which would allow, again, this leak. And that eventually became, yeah, the audience themselves.

KJ

Okay, so in a sense I guess because you were not coming originally from theatre, you were not bound by perhaps typical audience behaviour in the theatre which kind of was already a sort of a breaking away from those sort of, those barriers perhaps in a sense.

SS

We didn't have to really un-train. There were none of those theatre problems in our way.

KJ

Yeah, okay. Great. Okay, so more recently *Kitchen*, *Western Society* and now your latest work, *War and Peace* all heavily include audience participation. So is this work motivated by the same principles as your earlier experiments or have there been other shifts in your thinking?

SS

We find the audience in the theatre situation in *Western Society* as an example, or *Kitchen* as a good example of using an audience member as, as a projection screen in a

way. They arrive in a situation visibly unprepared and in both of those shows they wear headphones that are very visible. And they become involved in something we call remote acting. So they're either receiving, they're receiving some sort of instruction, so they're kind of being told what to do, or they're being asked to give in to this other sort of instruction, and the audience therefore looks at two things at once. They see this body, this unprepared body and they maybe hear the words of another, or see the actions of another. And it's something that if we were doing it as performers we... there would be no disconnect. There would be an assumption maybe that we owned that text, or we...

KJ

So in a sense is there an element of it being almost like a kind of an alienation device because of this disconnection?

SS

Yeah, it's definitely about alienation. And it's about, therefore, I don't know... They, it's, from our experience and what we're interested in is the ability to project onto a person who isn't sort of in on it. And also the ability to relate to that person because they've left one part of the auditorium and they've gone to another part of the room. You know, they've crossed over that line.

KJ

Yeah, that border.

SS

And they've kind of taken a little bit of the audience with them, so there's a certain sort of extension of themselves maybe into the performance space.

KJ

Yeah, that's exactly what I'm interested in and I'm going to come to presence in a moment actually. Okay, so moving along, a democratising of the arts has long since been the rhetoric of participation and in *Western Society*, Sarah suggests that you open the border and you give some audience members the opportunity to bask in the glow of

the performance. So to what extent does your work challenge or expose the conventional hierarchy of performer over spectator?

SS

Yeah, well in the first place in *Western Society* we're using the metaphor of the theatre lights, or whatever, as a... We're playing with the idea that the audience are outside Western Society quite literally. They're, you know, they're refugees seeking asylum and we have the key to the gate. So we're really playing, because it's, you know, the title is Western Society and we create this idea of a very lush, privileged, safe, light, warm space and suggest that the darkness of the seating area is somehow outside that, you know. It's quite a crude and direct metaphor and it relates less to our feelings about theatre, although of course it is, you know, we absolutely refer to the fourth wall and a wall or as a gate or whatever that's locked. But we are very concerned with creating an event which is live and which has a structure which no matter how fixed or tight still allows the event, the real time event to get in and affect what happens and how it happens. We don't do this in a big way with like some sort of crazy flow diagram of possibilities. We're always quite controlled in terms of where our performance is going from beginning, middle to end. But it's more within and within each moment there's room for play and for receiving signals from the outside.

KJ

I definitely saw that in *War and Peace* because actually when you were asking questions of the audience you gave them quite a lot of space.

SS

And that performance piece is very new and we're really, at the moment we've been making quite a lot of changes. We're still trying to make it much more... I mean we have it in *War and Peace* with those little bits at the table but we felt, actually, I mean not to go into a long story but *War and Peace* was made in quite a specific context which when it was first born it meant it was a lot more fixed than we like. And when it came to Nottingham it was kind of starting to crack open a little bit more, but we're still working on and that's, for me, that's, you know, it's got more to crack.

KJ

Yeah.

SS

Yes, you're right, yes we do, if we ask a question we wait. We definitely wait for the answer.

KJ

Great, so I'm coming to the table now, you talked about the table there with the audience. So in *Western Society* the audience are told that there will be seven golden tickets handed out to the audience at random, and the lucky winners will be made VIPs and rewarded with champagne and chocolates while the rest of the audience watch from the side-lines. So there's also an element of this VIP treatment in *War and Peace*. Again, there's that table there and I believe again they're invited to have a drink as well. So in this way, I'd like to suggest that the performance actually kind of draws a sort of self-reflexive critical attention to a hierarchy of spectatorship when participation is present. And, you know, you've talked about this idea of, you know, I think Sarah mentioned at one stage it was a bit like picking teams sometimes, when you're kind of taking out those performing spectators. So could you just say something in terms of the politics perhaps and the potential limitations of spectatorship in your work but, you know, more widely really where participation is present?

SS

You have to explain a little bit what you mean by the politics of spectatorship. So from what perspective do you want me to comment, from the audience's perspective? Or [inaudible 12:28].

KJ

I think, I guess, well, I guess in a way from both. So in my, you know, in watching both *Western Society* and *War and Peace*, one of the things I liked about it is the fact that it seemed to be consciously aware of the complication of what happens when you choose some people to be on stage

SS

Yes.

KJ

and you leave others behind, and it seemed to acknowledge that. It seemed to acknowledge it by, by I guess heightening the VIP status and making that explicit, rather than trying to kind of give this sense about it being an opening up and a democratising, at the same time it seemed to be aware of itself and the fact that whilst on the one hand it's doing that, on the other hand there's arguably a kind of different hierarchy being set up.

SS

Yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, it's an interesting reading and I can see why you would see it like that. And I'd never really thought about it. The VIP table in *Western Society* came along with those ideas of privilege and yes they do, if you read it from a theatre perspective they do acknowledge or reference, self-reference the status of the artist I guess in the situation. But for us it came from, um, from a different place. It arrives there but it came from, we were in Venice Beach as we did a residency in LA as part of that process and it was in Venice Beach where we found this collision of, of economies and we were very, very moved by that. And there's something, there's a huge influence from that strip on Venice Beach that place was what made us think about extremes or, yeah, occupying a position in proximity to another position which is very different. And you'd see it in the, that's what influences the gold, that overtly sort of sexy gold... I mean of course it's very cheap...

KJ

Yes, so there's an artifice there.

SS

Because we're being very cynical about it. And the VIP table is very cheap, we're being very cynical about the luxury. But it's also, it also is attached to the way we want to work with people, you know, some participatory work is interested in really provoking

the audience or challenging them in a way and that's not just Gob Squad's agenda. You know we really, in *Kitchen* we wanted it to be an exchange. We want something from them, therefore we want to make them feel as safe and as special as possible. And we definitely want them to be *with* us and we don't want to make them look stupid or feel stupid. And we want to frame their presence on the stage in a way that means we can have a real conversation, even if there's headphones and instructions and silly costumes and artifice involved. That we can exist there and we can really be there and when we look at each other, we see each other and when we speak to each other we're having an actual conversation. So that's our agenda in all of that work. And I think the VIP table just remained an interesting place for us. Of course there was, there's always a bit of work, a bit of one project that leaks into the next project. And I think for us it was that VIP table. But of course it ties right into the salon to the fear of then sort of high society

KJ

Yeah, of course it does in War and Peace.

SS

mingling in this...

KJ

Yeah, and notions of privilege and class again

SS

privileged safe place. But, yeah, it's an interesting... Of course, again, we are aware of the theatre as a site and it is, it's a layer in there but it's not our primary agenda.

KJ

Okay so there's been a kind of presupposition that a participatory spectator is a more emancipated spectator. So I recall that in *Western Society* it suggested that *sometimes* it's good to sit in the dark and watch, right? So in terms of watching spectators and performing spectators, how are you thinking about these roles in relation to kind of notions of passivity and activity and is there a sense that you can be emancipated whilst staying in your seat?

SS

That's a good question. Yes, unanimously yes. Before the audience gets involved in the work we still hope to work with the semi-improvisational structures and I think, therefore, the friction that's involved with having to get from A to B but not specifying how you can get there as a performer, or as a group of performers. You know, we are live writing that work in real time and, therefore, the room is active in that writing. And that involves the audience and that, therein it feels different. It feels different from, as a performer and it feels different as an audience. So, yes, they are, they're definitely activated even if they're just sitting there. Because they're affecting, you know, if they sneeze or laugh or walk out or, or not. Whether they are a small audience or a large audience or, you know, it's felt, it's felt in Gob Squad's work, it's not ignored.

KJ

Yeah, I certainly felt watching *Western Society* that there was a real sense of being *with* the audience members that were participating, wishing them well, hoping that they don't get it wrong, supporting them. And where perhaps they took their role too far or started something too soon, you know, really being with them if they laughed about that or if they were reprimanded in a joking way, really being there, you know, on that stage as part of it.

SS

If only seven people go in, like I was saying about *Kitchen* earlier, or I think if you know you've had this opportunity or this moment where you could of, but you didn't, and I'm not particularly into participating myself when I go and see theatre. And I certainly don't want to be forced to participate, but once somebody does go in, you tend to think about yourself don't you? Like how would I feel if that was me and there is a certain, yeah, you're on the same team. So, so you're kind of gunning for them, you know.

KJ

Yeah, it's that empathy isn't it?

SS

Yeah. It's different from the, from the informed position that the performer is in. So yeah, you go in with them. So it's something to do with the way the performance is structured and put together with this option to play for the performers. And then it's also to do with following the people that go in. I mean, at the end of *Kitchen*, at the end of *Western Society* the applause is for those people. You know it's as much as it is for us, you know, it's, it's their friends and their friends' friends and it's just the general sense that they've been through that thing and they've come out of it looking really good.

KJ

Yeah, that bow at the end that you do with the performing spectators, I think is a really significant moment that seems to be saying that there is an equality here, it's a recognition of the fact that they've worked too. A sense of, yeah, I guess recognising that labour.

SS

Yeah definitely.

KJ

So in both *Western Society* and *War and Peace* we see audience members taking centre stage and what I'm trying to establish is perhaps whether due to the rise in participation, spectator participation has become a practice in its own right. What I'm arguing is that because the audience has arguably changed and there are people out there now that seek out participation, and will take any opportunity available to get on stage and do stuff. There are people now that are expert in participation and know how to play, and how to take those opportunities. So, in your view, are there certain special skills and characteristics that are desirable in a performing spectator?

SS

Yeah, well it's a good subject. I think we very clearly, I mean it's hard. Okay so in *Kitchen* we, we invite the audience to walk behind the set before. There's a big screen at the front where we project three different films, and behind there's three different

performance spaces. So there are live films being made behind this big fourth wall. And we invite the audience behind this set at the beginning, before they take their seats. Partly because we want them to understand that the films are being made, they're not just watching a pre-recorded thing, which they did think when we first started. But also we want to kind of check them out, we get the opportunity to really carefully see who's making eye contact with us, who's looking *too* enthusiastic, who looks absolutely horrified at the idea that they're even on the stage etcetera. And we definitely would not choose the person who looks like they're saying choose me, choose me. And that's because if they start acting up on stage when we, in the situation that we want them to be in, they will not look good.

KJ

So there's a duty of care in a sense as well.

SS

They will, they will look a little bit foolish because, I mean and not in a good way.

KJ

Yeah.

SS

It's nice to be foolish and fragile and as performers we make sure that we are at least as foolish and fragile as any of them could possibly be, but when it comes to over-acting and playing up your situation and thinking it's all about you and that ego problem, it just, it just doesn't work. And the last thing we want is to make anybody look a bit silly, in a bad way. And that's something we have to be really careful about. And then when we made *Western Society*, because it's this strange lottery we were really concerned that we couldn't curate that selection in a careful way. But you do see, you know, so you have to really do it in the moment when you're out there chucking those toys. Sometimes there are people with their hands up.

KJ

Desperate, I saw that people were *leaping* up to try and get a toy.

SS

And you try your best to avoid those people

KJ

Okay.

SS

it's quite a strange, I had it the last time we did *Western Society* actually. There was a woman who was desperate to catch one of these toys and I kept, obviously I could see her so I had to sort of look at her and I even threw some toys in her vague direction but there was no way I was going to throw it into her arms. Even though with *Western Society* everything's slightly more contained

KJ

Yeah.

SS

so it's not as easy to run away with the situation or... And you can, when they come up there's also another moment when Matt is giving them their headphones and stuff and he knows which number will be which role.

KJ

Yeah.

SS

So he can, he has to check things like language. There's one gender specific, I mean if we can we choose a man for this one role. And also he can sort of see then, cos he gets a moment with them in the dark side, he can see then if somebody looks terribly nervous, or if somebody looks a little bit too eager. And he can kind of sort them out a little bit. So it's a really important point that.

KJ

Yeah, it's interesting because it seems like actually in a way you're quite resistant to expert participant spectators because you want something authentic, but at the same you're mindful of the fact that you've got a duty of care to those spectators, and also you've got a responsibility to the piece as well. That you select people and put them in the right roles so that it still functions, and so that they are also protected within that structure. I hadn't thought about potential barriers like language, which you just don't know until the spectator is out there, particularly in *Western Society*. Whereas with *War and Peace* there seemed to be a bit more of an interviewing process.

SS

Yeah, you've got to time to chat to people in the foyer for *War and Peace* and that's a different thing again because it really is just a conversation with those people and to make sure that they're happy with sitting on the stage, and I mean in Nottingham there's a raised stage, but in different venues of course there isn't that. So then they really are quite present both on screens and at the table. I mean often what we do is we kind of create an intimate situation with an audience member by either being behind the screen or not, or being physically in a situation where their image might be very big and zoomed in and quite exposing. Their actual physical person is sitting very close to ours and almost hidden. So we use the screen as a way to create intimacy and also project this big, vulnerable image, yeah.

KJ

In *Western Society* there was a really poignant moment where the performing spectators collectively leave the stage and watch a recording of their performance. In turn the watching spectators watch the performing spectators becoming watching spectators. And there appears to be something really interesting going on in terms of notions of presence, with the media, with each other and with ourselves. So could you maybe just say something about the way in which you were thinking about presence and also within a contemporary technological culture? What was that moment really about?

SS

Well, I'm really personally not one for idealising a process. So I would be lying and not true to myself if I suggested that this is exactly what should happen. It's the end. How do we end, you know? How does this whole thing end and then end. And of course they, they can see the show the whole way through because they're sitting, if they're not in it they can see from the table into behind the screen. So somehow there's a return for them to their, I mean we don't send them back out to their seats because it would be too messy. But there's a return for them to their sort of, to the dark side. And they get to see the result of their labour in a way. The product that they've, that they've contributed to making. And there is something that we want, that we... I'm not going to say we wanted anything, we discovered in trying out different ways to end the show that we liked the feeling of them being able to see themselves, and us being able to see them, see themselves. Us meaning everybody else. Because we'd already seen, there's something just theatre magical about, you know, you see them get their set up, you see them get the toy, the space, you see them get constructed, the screen comes and sort of closes them in. You see them on the screen, they've gone into the TV and they start to do this video that you talked about for the first half an hour, forty minutes. And there's something really magical about that. And everybody else gets to see it. This playback or these reconstructions of this playback and then, yeah, letting them sort of see their own sort of premier screening in a way there's, yeah. There's something really resolved about it.

KJ

Yeah, I think you're right. There is something really quite magical about watching their faces seeing where they've just been in a sense. It's like looking at yourself in a dream almost. And I don't know if in some way whilst resolving things, which it absolutely does, at the same time it also brings them into the disconnect, because they can see themselves in that other role that's not themselves, that's somebody else, that's you in a sense.

SS

Right.

KJ

But at the same time it's returning that performative self to the watching self.

SS

I think, cos also there's this mystery of this video that we never really show because we're not allowed to show it legally. But you see a little, you know, it fades into it at the end, you see their, their remake and it fades into the tiny image and you just see the granny walking in and you see her, and you see the guy come round to change the channel. So by this point it's a very, very recognisable film. And especially when you've embodied it. You know, when you've actually played granny and you've actually changed the channel. And then you see it with yourself and with this, you see that yes you have existed inside something that existed before. So there's, I mean there's an awful lot in it. But there's also just like how the fuck do we end this show? And there's a relationship, at the very end of *Kitchen* all the performers have left and four people who replace the performers are sitting in the kitchen chatting and I love that ending. And it's similar with this everybody else has left and you just see these people left there with this kind of ghostly sort of video. I mean then it comes back to an image of someone holding the phone but basically the show ends with just those people's images left. And maybe there's something, you know, because now there's a whole collection of those videos on YouTube and it continues to grow, and in terms of a sort of alone together or the alienation that technology fuels; it doesn't end there.

KJ

Yeah, it's ongoing. Well thank you Sharon.

SS

And thanks for being interested in Gob Squad!

TRANSCRIPTION ENDS